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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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23 dead as quarry collapses in Mizoram amid Remal rain

In a massive landslide 13 including two minors were killed

AIZAWL, 28 MAY

At least 23 people in a collapsed stone quarry, were killed in Mizoram on Tuesday due to landslides and incessant rain in the aftermath of cyclone 'Remal', officials said.

In a massive landslide, at least 13 people, including two minors, were killed and eight others were missing as a stone quarry collapsed in Aizawl district, a report of the Mizoram State Disaster Management Authority (MSDMA) said.

The incident happened around 6 am in an area between Melthum and Hlimen on the southern outskirts of the Aizawl town, an official said.

The report stated that several houses and worker camps caved in due to the impact of the landslide, burying at least 21 people beneath the debris.

A four-year-old boy and a six-year-old girl are among the victims of the stone quarry collapse, another police officer said.

A landslide swept away a building in Aizawl's Salem Veng, following which three persons went missing. Search is underway for them, an official said.

The state capital has been cut off from the rest of the country due to a landslide on National Highway 6 at Hunthar, officials said.

Besides, several intra-state highways have also been disrupted by landslides, they said.

Chief Minister Lalduhoma convened an emergency meeting with Home Minister K Sapdanga, Chief Secretary Renu Sharma and other senior officials to take stock of the situation, a senior official said.

He announced Rs 4 lakh ex-gratia for the families of those killed in calamities caused by rains, including the quarry collapse.

He handed over cheques of Rs 2 lakh each to the families of the eight Mizo people who died in the quarry collapse and said the remaining amount would be given to them soon. Meanwhile, more than 30 families were shifted to safer places due to unprecedented flooding of the Tlawng river at Sairang village, about 21 km from Aizawl, a senior official said. "Several farms on the bank of the river have been submerged by the water. The water level is continuing to rise. However, no casualty has been reported," he added. Because of the rains, all schools were closed and government employees, except those involved in providing essential services, were asked to work from home.

—PTI

>>>More on Page 4

Rescue work underway after a stone quarry collapsed amid heavy rain in the aftermath of Cyclone Remal, in Aizawl district, on Tuesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Missing Murugha Mutt POCSO victim found

BENGALURU, 28 MAY

The victim in POCSO case against Murugha Shree of Chitradurga has been found at Odanadi Seva Samsthe in Mysuru after her sudden disappearance, on Tuesday. The girl who had filed a sexual assault complaint against Shivamurthy Murugha Sharanaru of Chitradurga Muruga Mutt, was missing since 24 May according to her uncle's complaint. Reports indicate that she fled away due to the pressure exerted by Muruga Shree's supporters through her uncle. The sister organisation of Odanadi Seva Samsthe informed the presence of the girl to Chitradurga Women's Police Station. She reportedly expressed her distress to the police and Child Welfare Committee. ***—Salar News***

2 hybrid militants held for Pahalgam terror attack

SRINAGAR, 28 MAY

Security forces in Anantnag district have arrested two hybrid militants for a terror attack in Pahalgam earlier this month in which a tourist couple was injured, officials said on Tuesday. Those arrested have been identified as Waseem Ahmad Shah and Adnan Ahmad Beigh, both residents of Anantnag, they said. A pistol along with a magazine and eight rounds, a grenade, and 120 AK rounds were recovered from their possession, the officials said. "Security forces solved the Pahalgam terror attack by arresting two hybrid terrorists," the officials said.

—PTI

Kerala drowns as rains disrupt life; red alert on

T'PURAM, 28 MAY

After a brief lull, incessant rains accompanied by gusty winds pounded several parts of Kerala on Tuesday, disrupting normal life.

South and central districts like Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Kottayam, and Ernakulam mainly bore the brunt of the continuous downpour, which caused waterlogging, damage to houses, trees to be uprooted and tiny water bodies to overflow cutting across towns and villages. With the rain getting intense, the Indian Meteorological Department placed Kottayam and Ernakulam districts under red alert on Tuesday. An orange alert was sounded in Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, and Idukki, while Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Thrissur, Palakkad, Malappuram, and Kozhikode were placed under a yellow alert, as per the latest IMD update. Experts said cloudburst could be the reason for the heavier rainfall that pounded various parts of the port city of Kochi, especially the Kalamassery region, where flood water entered hundreds of houses.

Many narrow lanes and busy roads in Kochi and adjacent areas were submerged due to continuous downpours since early morning. Vehicles were seen moving at snail's pace on highways following the rain.

—PTI

Delhi to Varanasi IndiGo flight gets hoax bomb threat

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

A Varanasi-bound IndiGo flight received a bomb threat at the airport here on Tuesday morning but a search of the aircraft found it to be a hoax, officials said.

A thorough inspection was conducted, the officer said. The officials said the threat was found written on a piece of paper in a lavatory by the pilot when the Indigo 6E2211 flight was preparing to leave from the Indira Gandhi International Airport. Dramatic scenes unfolded at airport as the 176 passengers onboard the flight were evacuated via the emergency exits following the bomb threat. In one of the evacuation videos that went viral on social media, the pilot is seen sliding out of the aircraft using the emergency slides, indicating the tense moments.

—PTI

A passenger being evacuated through the emergency door ***PHOTO: PTI***

Vasantha, Rajeshwari, Saidharmathej ***PHOTO: PTI***

3 of family found dead in Koppal, murder suspected

KOPPAL, 28 MAY

Three members of a family were found dead in their home at Hosalingapur of Koppal taluk on Tuesday.

The deceased are Rajeshwari, 50, her daughter Vasantha, 28, and Vasantha's son Saidharmathej, 5. Vasantha, who had separated from her husband in Nandyala village in Andhra Pradesh two years ago, had been living in a rented house in New Singapore with her mother and son. She was employed at a puppet factory and had been married to a co-worker from a different religion. However, she had distanced herself from her husband about six months ago. The incident came to light on Tuesday when Rajeshwari's other daughter, unable to reach her mother by phone on the previous night, visited the house early in the morning.

—Salar News

PHONE TAPPING CASE

'KCR planned BJP leader's arrest to free Kavitha from ED'

HYDERABAD, 28 MAY

Former Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao allegedly wanted to use "BRS MLAs" poaching case to force BJP into a compromise to get rid of the ED case against his daughter and MLC K Kavitha, according to the confession statement of a former police official arrested in connection with the phone-tapping case.

As per former Deputy Commissioner of Police P Radha Kishan Rao's confessional statement, one of the accused in the phone tapping case, 'Peddayana'--an indirect reference to Bharat Rashtra Samithi chief and former CM K Chandrasekar Rao(KCR)--wanted the arrest of BJP National General Secretary, Organisation, BL Santhosh in connection with alleged attempt to poach his party MLAs.

"A Special Investigation Team (SIT) was formed and KCR wanted the arrest of senior BJP leader Santhosh to make the case strong so that BJP would come for compromise and it can be used to get rid of the ED case on his daughter Kavitha. However, due to inefficiency of some police officials, one important person escaped police apprehension and later the case went to High Court, where not to arrest orders were issued and then the SIT case was transferred to CBI," the confession report said.

K Chandrasekhar Rao ***PHOTO: PTI***

Rao was arrested by Hyderabad Police in March this year as part of the ongoing probe into the phone-tapping case pertaining to the previous BRS regime, and destroying certain computer systems and official data. He is accused of being part of the conspiracy with some others including suspended DSP D Praneeth Kumar alias Praneeth Rao of the Special Intelligence Bureau (SIB) in unauthorised developing of private persons' profiles and using them in a partisan manner to favour a political party at the behest of some persons.

This organised work started in 2018 before the Assembly elections and continued to 2019 Lok Sabha elections and various bye-elections in the state--Dubbak, Huzurabad and Munugode, he said. *—PTI*

20 yrs after murder, HC acquits Ram Rahim

CHANDIGARH, 28 MAY

Punjab and Haryana High Court on Tuesday acquitted Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh and four others in the murder case of the sect's former manager Ranjit Singh in 2002.

The Sirsa-headquartered secretary chief, who is also serving a 20-year jail term for raping two of his disciples, is currently lodged in Sunaria jail in Rohtak, Haryana.

Dera chief's lawyer Jitender Khurana said said the arguments in the case had got over earlier and the matter came up for pronouncement of verdict before the high court on Tuesday.

Khurana said a division bench of Justice Sureshwar Thakur and Justice Lalit Batra pronounced the decision on the appeals filed by Ram Rahim and four others who had been convicted by a special CBI court in Panchkula, Haryana, in October 2021.

Ram Rahim ***PHOTO: PTI***

The court had sentenced them to life imprisonment in the nearly 20-year-old murder case of Ranjit. He had been held guilty of hatching a criminal conspiracy with his co-accused. Ranjit, who was also a follower of the sect, was shot dead on 10 July, 2002, at Khanpur Kolian village in Haryana's Kurukshetra.

He was allegedly murdered for his suspected role in the circulation of an anonymous letter, which narrated how women were being sexually exploited by the sect head at the Dera headquarters. *—PTI*

'Will protect Constitution with dil, jaan aur khoon'

BANSGAON, 28 MAY

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Monday that INDIA bloc government will end the 50 per cent cap on reservation while asserting that the alliance will protect the Constitution with "dil, jaan aur khoon".

Addressing an election rally in Uttar Pradesh's Bansgaon with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, the Congress leader also mocked the Prime Minister over his "sent by God" comment and said God sent Modi to help Adani and not the poor.

"There is a fight of ideology in these elections. There is INDIA bloc and the Constitution on one side and those who want to finish the Constitution on the other," Gandhi said at the rally.

Holding up a copy of the Constitution and photograph of Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Gandhi said Ambedkar dedicated his life to the Constitution.

"Dalits faced atrocities for years. In our Constitution, they were given honour. But now, the BJP says that they will tear apart Ambedkar's work. No force can dare to tear the constitution of Dr Ambedkar and (Jawaharlal) Nehru," the former Congress president said.

Hitting out at the BJP over the death of a slain Dalit youth's sister in Madhya Pradesh's Sagar, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday alleged that Modi has ended the rule of law and asserted that "we will create a system where even the weakest person will be able to raise his voice strongly against oppression". *—PTI*

SUMMER BURNS IN THE HILLS

Fire engulfs Shimla forest; 991 cases so far

SHIMLA/ HAMIRPUR, 28 MAY

Himachal Pradesh has witnessed 991 forest fire incidents since the onset of summers with two incidents of forest fires reported in Shimla and Hamirpur district on Tuesday, officials said.

A massive fire broke out in a forest in Shimla's Tutikandi area around 11.30am and reached a government building, officials said. No casualties have been reported so far.

In Hamirpur, the drinking water supply in the town was disrupted as the main pump house was damaged in a forest fire, they said.

The fire which broke out in Hiranagar area around 2.30pm quickly spread throughout the forest and reached the pump house.

Smoke billows rise high after a fire broke out in forest areas of Dhauladhar Range on Tuesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

According to the fire department's data, 991 forest fire incidents have been reported in the state this summer season.

Man-made activities like throwing a burning cigarette in the forest and lighting up a fire for various purposes also lead to a large number of fires, he said, adding that efforts are being taken to control such incidents.

Himachal has a total of 2,026 forest beats out of which 339 are "very sensitive", 667 are "sensitive" and 1,020 are less prone to forest fires.

In Tutikandi, the blaze started at around 11.30am. It quickly spread throughout the forest and reached Bal Ashram of the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment located on the outskirts of Shimla city, they said.

The fire tenders were able to control the fire around the ashram, the officials said.

Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Shimla (Rural) Aneesh Sharma confirmed the report and said efforts are being made to douse the blaze which will take one to two hours.

The Assistant Engineer of Hamirpur subdivision of Jal Shakti Department said that the wires and other equipment of the pump house have been burnt and the water supply in the town could remain disrupted for the next two days.

—PTI

Phase 6 sees 63.37% turnout as 7 cr people vote

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

The penultimate phase of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections recorded 63.37 per cent voter turnout with 7.05 crore out of 11.13 crore eligible voters exercising their franchise, the Election Commission of India on Tuesday said.

As many as 58 seats in eight states went to polls in the sixth phase on 25 May .

Of the 87.54 crore electors in the first six phases of the Lok Sabha polls, as many as 57.77 crore voters turned up at the polling stations to cast their votes. According to the Election Commission (EC), the voter turnout in the fifth phase of the ongoing polls held on 20 May was recorded at 62.2 per cent. The turnout in the fourth phase stood at 69.16 per cent. *—PTI*

Headmaster held for impregnating 13-yr-old student

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 28 MAY

The Headmaster of Government Higher Primary School at Varadanayakanahalli in Sidlagatta taluk in Chikkaballapur was arrested on charges of impregnating a 13-year-old girl studying in 7th Standard.

Narendra Kumar, Block Educational Officer, Sidlagatta, has written to DDPI, Chikkaballapur, seeking disciplinary action against the accused headmaster, Venkatesh.

On Monday, the girl complained of stomach pain. Her mother took her to a hospital where it was revealed that the girl was pregnant. The girl told her parents that the Headmaster had repeatedly raped her. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

Case filed for defacing elephant Arjuna's grave

HASSAN, 28 MAY

A man from HD Kote was booked on charges of defacing the grave of Dasara elephant Arjuna and trespassing into a forest area. Yasalur Range Forest Officer of Sakaleshpur taluk filed an FIR against Naveen from HD Kote on Tuesday. Naveen, along with a group of people claiming to be fans of actor Darshan, started constructing a memorial near the grave, trespassing into the reserve forest. The incident sparked controversy when fans shared a video suggesting that Darshan, had sent stones for the construction. However, objections arose regarding the unauthorised construction of the memorial without the permission of the government. Accusations were also made against Naveen for illegally soliciting funds from the public and defacing the graves. In response, a case has been registered under Section 33 of Karnataka Forest Act, 1963, and Rule 25-43 of Karnataka Forest Rules, 1969. —*Salar News*

Bellur tense after mob ransacks houses

MANDYA, 28 MAY

Tension gripped Bellur town after a mob attacked a youth and ransacked a few houses over alleged business rivalry, police said on Tuesday. Demanding action against the assailants, several families staged a demonstration at Bellur police station on Monday night. According to police, a large group of people attacked Abhilash, 29, and injured him badly. The injured youth has been admitted to a hospital where his condition is said to be critical. —*PTI*

DDUTTL ex-MD held over fund misappropriation

BENGALURU, 28 MAY

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) sleuths arrested S Shankarappa, former managing director of D Devaraj Urs Truck Terminal Limited (DDUTTL) on charges of misappropriation of funds. Shankarappa, now working as Deputy Director of Information and Public Relations Department, was allegedly involved in misappropriating Rs 47.10 crore of DDUTTL when he was MD from 2021 to 2023. The current Managing Director CN Shivprakash had lodged a complaint with Wilson Garden police station last September and the investigation was transferred to CID. During the 194th Board of Directors' meeting of DDUTTL held on 25 October, 2021, discussions were held for repairing and maintaining truck terminals. It was illegally approved to issue piecemeal contracts totalling up to Rs 10 crore. The complaint alleged that funds were obtained by creating fake documents, despite the work not being carried out. In their investigation, CID officials raided the DDUTTL office and several residences, seizing over 600 documents. —*Salar News*

If Prajwal doesn't turn up on 31 May, will try next step: HM

No one can escape from clutches of law, says Parameshwara

BENGALURU, 28 MAY

Home Minister G Parameshwara indicated that the next procedure to bring back Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, who is facing charges of sexually abusing several women, from abroad will commence if he does not turn up on 31 May, on Tuesday.

His statement comes a day after Prajwal released a video statement that he will appear before the Special Investigation Team (SIT) and cooperate with the inquiry.

"We have taken all efforts within the country to bring Prajwal back. We have written to the Central government, we have obtained a warrant against him, which we have informed Ministry of Home and External Affairs. Also, a Blue Corner Notice has been issued. In the meantime, he released a video message about his return," Parameshwara said.

Prajwal's decision to come back is appropriate as no one can escape from the clutches of law, he said.

"It is said that his membership will expire if he loses the election, and his diplomatic passport will also be impounded. Considering all this he might have decided to come back."

Prajwal also claimed that he "went into depression" and "isolated" himself as he accused Rahul Gandhi and other Congress leaders of sparking a discussion on the issue as part of an alleged conspiracy.

Once Prajwal returns, the legal process would begin, he said, "I don't know what prompted him to release that video... We will see what happens on 31 May. If he doesn't turn up, the next procedure will start."

To a question, would Prajwal be arrested at the immigration centre when he lands, Parameshwara said, SIT will decide it.

Asked about Prajwal's allegation that Congress conspired against him, Home Minister said, "Let's see all those things. SIT will consider all those things." —*PTI*

Home Minister G Parameshwara PHOTO: SALAR

Prajwal Revanna being an MP should give a clear statement in this case. He should face the SIT probe. This is our demand too

-BY Vijayendra, State BJP President

Two arrested for distributing pen drives of sex scandal

BENGALURU, 28 MAY

Special Investigation Team probing charges of sexual abuse against Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, on Tuesday arrested two people who had allegedly distributed pen drives containing explicit videos of the said abuse of several women allegedly perpetrated by the JD (S) leader.

According to police sources, the two people were arrested when they came to the High Court.

They had allegedly distributed pen drives containing videos showing women being sexually assaulted allegedly by Prajwal. —*PTI*

Bhavani Revanna files anticipatory bail in kidnapping case

BENGALURU, 28 MAY

Bhavani Revanna, mother of Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, who is accused in the obscene video case, has filed an anticipatory bail in the kidnapping case in which her husband was earlier arrested.Bhavani has moved Karnataka High Court seeking relief from arrest by SIT. SIT has filed a case against five including her husband and father of Prajwal Revanna, HD Revanna. HD Revanna was arrested earlier in connection with a kidnapping case on 29 April. He was granted conditional bail by a special court for people's representatives. The case involves alleged sexual assault by Revanna and his son, Prajwal Revanna, against a house help. —*ANI*

13 JUNE POLLS

300 aspirants for 11 MLC seats, says Shivakumar

BENGALURU, 28 MAY

State Congress President DK Shivakumar on Tuesday said that the party leadership is in a "difficult position" as there are more than 300 ticket aspirants for the Legislative Council elections.

Shivakumar said the party high command will decide on the tickets.

Biennial elections to 11 seats of the Legislative Council to be elected by Members of the Legislative Assembly will be held on 13 June.

As per the existing strength of parties in the Assembly, Congress can win seven seats, the BJP three and JD(S) one seat.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar today left for New Delhi to discuss candidates with Congress high command.

The schedule for filing nominations for the MLC election has already begun, and it will go on till 3 3.

"There are more than 300 aspirants, they are from all sections. It is not possible to accommodate all sections for seven seats. There are also sitting members. All of them have worked for the party. There is no one who has not worked," Shivakumar said. —*PTI*

'CM, DyCM should consult senior leaders'

BENGALURU, 28 MAY

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Tuesday said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and State Congress Chief DK Shivakumar should consult senior party leaders like him regarding selection of candidates for the MLC polls.

The statement comes against the backdrop of Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar's trip to New Delhi today to discuss with the party high command candidates for biennial election to 11 seats of Legislative Council.

"The Chief Minister and KPCC President are in responsible positions. It is appropriate if they consult seniors like us. Without consulting if they both decide on their own, it is not right according to me. Those with seniority and experience, both in the party and the government and having contacts, should be consulted. They have to discuss with us," Parameshwara said. —*PTI*

NSUI workers 'blacken' Savarkar signboard, held

BENGALURU, 28 MAY

Three NSUI workers were arrested on Tuesday for allegedly blackening the signboard of a flyover named after Hindutva ideologue Veer Savarkar, at Yelahanka here, police said. The incident took place on the birth anniversary of Savarkar.

According to police, a group of activists of National Students' Union of India (NSUI), the students' wing of the Congress party, staged a protest demanding that the flyover be renamed. They allegedly blackened Sarvarkar's name on the board and put up a banner bearing the name 'Bhagat Singh flyover' and also raised the slogans 'Inquilab Zindabad', holding up Bhagat Singh's pictures. "They had put black paint on the board. We have registered a case under the Prevention of Destruction and Loss of Public Property Act," a senior police officer said.

The board was restored later, he said. The flyover was named after Savarkar when BJP was in power amid Opposition from certain sections, including Congress. R Ashoka, Leader of Opposition, Congress following the incident. "While Veer Savarkar's photo adorned @ RahulGandhi 's Bharat Jodo yatra in Karnataka, @ INCKarnataka and its affiliates continue to denigrate Veer Savarkar by defacing the signboard of Veer Savarkar flyover in Bengaluru," Ashoka said on X platform. —*Salar News*

A worker cleans the signboard after the defacement. PHOTO: PTI

FUND MISAPPROPRIATION

Tribal body officials booked over colleague's suicide

SHIVAMOGGA , 28 MAY

Karnataka Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation (KMVSTDC) Managing Director, Accounts Officer and Union Bank of India Chief Manager were booked over the suicide of 48-year-old accounts superintendent Chandrasekaran P.

Scheduled Tribes Welfare Minister B Nagendra said the case has been handed over to the CID and an FIR has been registered against KMVSTDC Managing Director JG Padmanabha, Accounts Officer Parashuram Durugannavar and UBI Chief Manager Shuchiswat.

Chandrasekaran, who is posted in Bengaluru, purportedly left a six-page note before hanging himself from a ceiling fan at his residence on Sunday evening, they said. In the purported suicide note, he has held the three officials responsible for his death as well as the alleged misappropriation of around Rs 87 crore, police said. "He alleged that he was 'harassed' by the officials who allegedly used him for 'misappropriation of funds for personal gains'. Later, when he came to know that if an inquiry is initiated and an FIR is registered against him, he would be jailed and that also prompted him to take this drastic step," a senior police officer said.

The deceased accused his senior officers of forcing him to open a parallel bank account to divert unaccounted money from the corporation's primary account, he said in the note. He also alleged that he was directed by a minister and an officer to open a "sweep-in and sweep-out account" that allowed customers to transfer funds between savings and current accounts and link fixed deposit accounts at a bank branch on MG Road in Bengaluru, the police officer said.

The accused government employees are currently absconding, he added.

"Whoever is involved in it and however influential they are, we will not spare them. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar have taken it seriously. If the forensic report says the MD had signed on it, then we will suspend him. We will not let the leakage of public money happen," Minister Nagendra said. —*PTI*

Namaz on road draws anger from Hindutva outfits

MANGALURU, 28 MAY

A group of unidentified people performed namaz (Islamic prayer) on a public road in front of a mosque in Kankanady, drawing an angry response from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad which said it would conduct Hanuman Chalisa on the road.

According to police sources, the incident occurred on 24 May. It caused inconvenience to commuters, as they had to take a long detour.

Mangaluru East police filed a case on its own against the people involved.

The VHP's Regional Joint Secretary, Sharan Pumpwell, demanded that the district authorities should act immediately. He said if these incidents are repeated, then they will hold Hanuman Chalisa mass recitations at the locations where roads are closed for namaz. —*PTI*

Hijab ban protester takes a dig at ex-BJP MLA

KOLAR, 18 APRIL

Aliya Assadi, who was suspended from Udupi Government PU College over the hijab controversy, has hit out at former Udupi MLA Raghupathi Bhatt, who was expelled from BJP for six years for contesting as a rebel candidate in Legislative Council election.

"I was thrown out of college because of my hijab that day. For that reason, you have done a great job for the party. Today I saw the same party expelling you," Assadi said on X platform. "God will do what He wills. God will do what He does," said Assadi, who led a protest against Hijab ban by State government. "When I was an expelled student, you earned a degree in the party. Today, I am a law student, and you are the one being expelled. I was able to witness that moment right here in Udupi." —*Salar News*

BBMP cracks down on illegal ads

BENGALURU, 28 MAY

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has launched a campaign to remove unauthorised advertisements and displays in the South Zone of City.

BBMP has appealed to Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and citizens to join hands in this initiative citing the Government of India's notification of banning the use of plastic.

According to BBMP's Outdoor Signage and Public Messaging Bye-laws 2018, only shop-front advertisements, advertisements on vehicles and other minor advertisements are permitted in the City within the size and time restrictions. BBMP highlighted that commercial advertisements, large LED displays and installation of banners, buntings, posters in residential areas are strictly prohibited. These not only disrupt traffic flow but also contribute to environmental pollution.

PHOTO: SALAR

BBMP has urged citizens to report any unauthorised advertisements by sending photographs to Corporation's Advertisement Department WhatsApp number (9480683939) or calling South Zone Control Room (080-26566362/22975704). BBMP will remove such displays immediately and impose penalties. BBMP may also file FIRs under Karnataka Open Spaces (Prevention of Defacement) Act, 1981. —Salar News

MITIGATION EFFORTS ON

63 accident black spots in City

BENGALURU, 28 MAY

Bengaluru Traffic Police have identified 63 accident-prone locations, commonly referred to as "accident black spots," across City.

MN Anucheth, City Joint Commissioner (Traffic), said, "We have decided to get monthly reports on the black spots and produce reports to mitigate accidents in these areas. The main intention is to collaborate with civic agencies in the pursuit of measures to reduce accidents in the black spots."

These black spots span various jurisdictional police stations and traffic police divisions within the City, including areas along State Highways, National Highways and Ring Roads. The new measures include the installation of accident zone signboards, construction of skywalks, placement of cat eyes and blinkers, CCTV cameras, rumble strips, road markings, road humps, street lights and speed limit signage boards.

Police will work with civic agencies in the pursuit of measures to reduce accidents in the black spots PHOTO: PTI

Reduction in drunk driving cases

An analysis of road accidents over the past five months revealed a slight reduction in accident cases, especially drunk driving ones. Drink driving cases have decreased by 2.6 per cent in 2024 and accident cases have reduced by 4.2 per cent.

Cases for vehicles sans fuel

If a vehicle is found on the road without fuel, a case will be filed against the driver under Section 283 of IPC for actions or negligence causing danger, obstruction, or injury to any person in a public place.

Cases against parents of minors performing stunts

If minors are caught performing wheeling stunts, their parents will face charges under Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. —*Salar News*

IPL: 1 held for phone thefts

BENGALURU, 28 MAY

Siddapura police have arrested a member of a gang of four who stole mobile phones during IPL matches in City and seized 32 high-end mobile phones from him, City Police Commissioner B Dayananda said on Tuesday. "The gang of four was active in Jayanagar, Shivajinagar, Cubbon Park and Lalbagh. We will apprehend the other three soon," he said. Dayananda awarded Siddapura police Rs 10,000.

22-year-old man involved in 17 crimes arrested

City police arrested a 22-year-old man who was involved in 17 crime cases, including robbery and dacoity.

"Basavanagudi police seized gold valued at Rs 8.70 lakh. The accused is wanted in robberies across Mysuru, Bengaluru and Andhra Pradesh," Commissioner Dayananda said. Basavanagudi police seized 75 grams of gold, 4.9kg of silver, one digital locker and three two-wheelers. Dayananda awarded Basavanagudi police Rs 10,000 for solving the case.

2 held for seizing 11 two-wheelers

Girinagar police arrested two people and seized 11 two-wheelers that were stolen. Commissioner Dayananda said, "One of the accused has a murder case against him in Doddaballapur, and we have sent both accused into custody." Dayananda rewarded Girinagar police with Rs 10,000. —*Salar News*

Case filed against detective agencies for selling call records

BENGALURU, 28 MAY

City police have registered three cases against private detective agencies for illegally selling people's call detail records (CDR) to clients.

"Seven people have been arrested and police have got hold of 43 sets of CDR," City Police Commissioner B Dayananda said. "The case has been handed over to Central Crime Branch to find out who sought the call details, whose mobile phones were spied on and the reasons behind these activities." —*Salar News*

Modi to meditate in Tamil Nadu after 30 May

NEW DELHI/CHENNAI, 28 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will meditate at Rock Memorial, a monument built in tribute to Swami Vivekananda, in Kanyakumari following the culmination of the Lok Sabha polls campaign on 30 May, BJP leaders said on Tuesday. He will meditate from the evening of 30 May to the evening of 1 June at Dhyan Mandapam, the place where Vivekananda is believed to have had a divine vision about 'Bharat Mata', they said. Modi had gone on a similar meditation exercise in a Kedarnath cave after the 2019 poll campaign. Party functionaries said Modi's decision to pick the spot in Kanyakumari for his spiritual sojourn underscores his commitment to bringing to fruition Vivekananda's vision for the country. *—PTI*

Bomb threat to T'gana's DyCM's home a hoax

HYDERABAD, 28 MAY

An unidentified person on Tuesday allegedly made a call stating that a bomb would explode at Praja Bhavan, the official residence of Telangana Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, prompting the police to carry out searches, official sources said. Police immediately swung into action and searched the premises with the help of the bomb disposal squad. Telangana Minister for Panchayat Raj and Rural Development and Women and Child Welfare D Anasuya, popularly known as Seethakka, visited Praja Bhavan, and met with the officials and also the family members of the Deputy CM and discussed the matter. The minister instructed the officials to thoroughly check the visitors and to also step up security at Praja Bhavan, the statement said. *—PTI*

BRS loses several civic body posts in no-trust motions

HYDERABAD, 28 MAY

In a further setback to BRS, the Opposition party has lost about 15 municipal chairperson posts and around half a dozen posts of municipal vice-chairperson to ruling Congress due to no-confidence motions moved against them and resignations since the national party came to power six months ago, official sources said on Tuesday. The number of no-confidence motions is seen as unprecedented and Congress bagging the posts of chiefs of Urban Local Bodies is expected to strengthen the party in urban areas. BRS (then TRS) swept the municipal elections held in the state in 2020, winning 107 out of 120 municipalities. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

BJP's Ravi Kishan calls Tharoor 'angrez aadmi'

GORAKHPUR, 28 MAY

Ravi Kishan, who is BJP's candidate from Gorakhpur, hit out Congress leader Shashi Tharoor, calling him an "angrez aadmi" after the latter predicted that it would be difficult for BJP to even cross 300 seats in the Lok Sabha elections. Hitting back at Tharoor, BJP MP from Gorakhpur said, "Shashi Tharoor is 'angrez aadmi'. We go to Manali and Shimla on vacations; they come to India during elections. They neither know the country nor its villages. They don't know this sweat..." He also underlined the importance of the Bhojpuri language, which made him, as per him, a "superstar." Ravi Kishan is seeking second term from Gorakhpur. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Kishan emerged victorious against Samajwadi Party (SP) candidate Rambhual Nishad with a margin of 3,01,664 votes. *—ANI*

Agnipath a national threat, says Cong

Kharge said the scheme has shrunk recruitment

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Congress on Tuesday accused the Modi government of playing with national security by "imposing" the Agnipath scheme, and said the military recruitment programme would be scrapped when an INDIA bloc government is formed at the Centre to give justice to the patriotic youth of the country.

Congress also said that the Agnipath scheme is a "national security threat" and it has shrunk the stream of recruitment which can compromise the country's security for the next decade.

"We have three questions, whose befitting reply the public will now give to BJP in the last phase of the elections," Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said on X. Kharge also dismissed the BJP's '400 paar' claim as "bakwas", or nonsense and said the party will not cross 200 seats in the Lok Sabha polls. "Is it not true that Agnipath has reduced the number of recruitments from 75,000 per year to 46,000 per year? Is it not true that the Defence Minister of the country has to repeatedly reiterate that he will reconsider the Agniveer scheme, make changes and improvements in it," he asked.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge with party candidate for Lok Sabha polls Gurjeet Singh Aujla addresses a press conference **PHOTO: PTI**

He said on one hand, the country's borders are facing Chinese infiltration, occupation and encroachment, for which more military force is needed.

"Congress guarantees that we will scrap the Agniveer scheme. Only then will our patriotic youth get justice! Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Hindustan," Kharge said.

Earlier in the day, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said that the scheme was a "national security threat". Congress leader Rahul Gandhi too accused the Modi government of "playing with" national security and the future of the youth by bringing in the Agnipath scheme. Calling Prime Minister "anti-people", Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi said he is misleading people in the name of religion to remain in power. *—PTI*

'TMC snatched OBCs' rights for vote jihad'

Narendra Modi said tribals population has fallen

BARASAT, 28 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday flayed TMC government in West Bengal for "snatching the rights of OBC youths" to facilitate its appeasement politics and "vote jihad".

Claiming that the tribal population was decreasing in the Santhal Parganas because of infiltration, Modi accused JMM-led ruling alliance in Jharkhand of "patronising" infiltrators, who he said were grabbing land and putting women at risk.

Addressing an election rally in Barasat, Modi, without naming West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, criticised her for questioning the judges of the Calcutta High Court and wondered if the TMC would now "let loose its goons on judges" following unfavourable rulings.

"The court has exposed the treachery of the Trinamool Congress with the OBCs. The party snatched the rights of OBC youths to support its appeasement politics and 'vote jihad'. The TMC has betrayed the OBCs of West Bengal," he asserted.

The Calcutta High Court had last week struck down the OBC status of several classes in West Bengal granted since 2010, finding such reservations to vacancies in services and posts in the state illegal.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with West Bengal BJP President Sukanta Majumdar and party leader Suvendu Adhikari in a roadshow **PHOTO: PTI**

Banerjee had said she will "not accept" the ruling, dubbing it as a verdict passed under the influence of BJP.

"It is quite evident that TMC doesn't like those who expose its treachery and lies. I am astonished to see how the party is questioning the judiciary. Don't they have any faith in the judiciary and our Constitution?

"The way they are attacking judges is unprecedented. I would like to know whether the TMC would now let loose its goons on judges as they are exposed? The entire country is seeing how TMC is strangulating the judiciary in West Bengal," Modi said.

Reaffirming his commitment to combat corruption, Modi said after his resolve of "na khaunga, na khane dunga" (I will neither accept bribes nor allow others to do so), his new guarantee is "jisne khaya hain usey bahar nikalunga." *—PTI*

'BJP's 9 self-goals will boost BJD's prospect'

BHUBANESWAR, 28 MAY

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's close aide and senior BJD leader VK Pandian on Tuesday claimed the Opposition BJP has "committed nine self-goals" during the ongoing Lok Sabha and Odisha Assembly polls thus boosting the regional party's electoral prospect.

Pandian claimed that BJP's self-goals will help the BJD and none can stop the regional party from forming the government for the sixth consecutive time.

Lok Sabha and Assembly elections are being held simultaneously in Odisha. He also claimed that BJD has so far by the end of the third phase of Assembly polls, already secured majority to form government in the state and the next and final phase of voting will be held in BJD's strong-hold areas.

Pandian claimed that the number one "self-goal" or "mistake" of BJP was to drag Lord Jagannath's name to the political discourse and also using "abusive language" against Odisha's "most popular" and five-time chief minister Naveen Patnaik.

On the second "self-goal", Pandian said they have said in the manifesto to "close down" the Mission Shakti if BJP comes to power. They have all along conspired against Mission Shakti which has about 70 lakh women membership. This possible action of BJP has created a "panicky situation" among the women.

He said if BJP comes to power, it will "stop" the benefits of the Biju Swaasthya Kalyan Yojana for the people of Odisha by implementing the Ayushman Bharat scheme. *—PTI*

Policies in India are anti-poor: PC

KOZHIKODE, 28 MAY

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Tuesday said the various welfare schemes and policies in the country were "not pivoted to the poor". Chidambaram said an egalitarian society can be created only if the schemes and policies are oriented towards the poor. *—PTI*

APEX COURT UPDATE

Court reserves order on ED charge sheet against Kejri

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

A Delhi court on Tuesday reserved for 4 June its order on whether to take cognisance of the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) supplementary charge sheet against Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the money laundering case linked to the alleged excise scam.

The court will also decide whether to take note of the alleged offence against AAP, the first political party which has been booked under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) by the ED.

Arvind Kejriwal **PHOTO: PTI**

The supplementary charge sheet has also claimed that bribes were received even from Punjab businessmen to allow them to invest in liquor trade in the national capital.

CJI to decide on Kejriwal's urgent 'extend bail' plea

The Chief Justice of India will take a decision on the urgent listing of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea seeking extension of his interim bail by seven days for undergoing medical tests as the verdict in the main case is already reserved, the Supreme Court said.

Refusing to list Kejriwal's interim plea on its own, a vacation bench comprising Justices JK Maheshwari and KV Viswanathan asked senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the Chief Minister, why it was not mentioned last week when Justice Dipankar Datta was sitting on the vacation bench. *—PTI*

HC SEEKS ED'S REPLY IN SOREN BAIL PLEA

RANCHI, 28 MAY

The Jharkhand High Court on Tuesday directed the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to file a reply on the bail application moved by former chief minister Hemant Soren. Soren, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on 31 January in connection with a money-laundering case linked to an alleged land scam, filed the petition before the high court and requested an early hearing of the matter. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal pleaded that the JMM leader was a victim of political conspiracy. *—PTI*

Excise scam: CBI, ED oppose Kavitha's bail pleas

K Kavitha **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

The CBI and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday opposed in the Delhi High Court the bail pleas of BRS leader K Kavitha in the corruption and money laundering cases linked to the alleged excise policy scam, saying she was "highly influential and powerful" to influence the witnesses. Countering the submission made on behalf of Kavitha that she, being a woman, be released on bail, the probe agencies contended she played a key role in the conspiracy behind the "scam" and, being an active politician and a member of the Telangana legislative council, she cannot seek parity with "vulnerable" women.

After hearing the arguments of the counsel for the ED, Central Bureau of Investigation, and Kavitha, Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma reserved the orders on her bail applications. *—PTI*

Sandeshkhali row: CBI slaps attempt to murder case on Shahjahan Sheikh

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

The CBI has charged suspended TMC leader Shahjahan Sheikh, his brother and five others with criminal conspiracy and attempt to murder in connection with a mob attack on an Enforcement Directorate team in Sandeshkhali on 5 January, officials said on Tuesday.

The agency's first charge sheet in the case was filed on Monday before a Basirhat special court, they said.

The ED team came under attack from a 1,000-strong mob when it went to raid Sheikh's house in connection with the multi-crore ration distribution scam in West Bengal. It had also gone to arrest Sheikh because of his alleged close links with arrested former state food minister Jyoti Priya Mallick, under the scanner in the scam, they said.

The charge sheet is against seven people, including Sheikh, his brother Alomgir and associates Jiauddin Mollah, Mafujar Mollah, and Didarbaksh Mollah, they said.

The CBI has invoked Indian Penal Code Sections 120-B (criminal conspiracy) and 307 (attempt to murder) on the accused besides rioting and unlawful assembly among a number of other charges, they said.

The Central Bureau of Investigation has taken over investigation in three cases related to incidents on 5 January .

"Investigation revealed that Sheikh was the key conspirator behind the inciden," a CBI spokesperson said. *—PTI*

Court sends Bibhav Kumar to three-day police custody

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

A court granted three days to Delhi Police for custodial interrogation of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar, who has been accused of assaulting AAP Rajya Sabha member Swati Maliwal, on Tuesday. Maliwal was allegedly assaulted at Chief Minister's official residence on 13 May.

Metropolitan Magistrate Gaurav Goyal sent Kumar to police custody till 31 May.

Kumar's counsel opposed Delhi Police's plea for his custodial interrogation, claiming it had no evidence.

Kumar's bail plea was dismissed by a Session's Court, which said there appeared no "pre-meditation" by Maliwal in lodging FIR and that her allegations could not be "swiped away". Kumar was arrested on 18 May. He was sent to police custody for five days on the same day by a magisterial court, which observed that his anticipatory bail plea had become infructuous because of his arrest. *—PTI*

Yogi Adityanath **PHOTO: PTI**

Cong, SP have lost their minds on Ram temple: Yogi

GORAKHPUR, 28 MAY

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday said Congress and Samajwadi Party leaders seem to have lost their minds on the issue of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and added the "adversaries of Lord Ram have never found lasting peace".

Addressing an election rally in Gorakhpur, Adityanath said, "Congress says the construction of the temple has sent a wrong message globally and should not have been built, whereas Samajwadi Party dismisses the temple as useless. The leaders of both parties seem to have lost their minds."

"Ram Bhakts (devotees) have built an international airport named after Maharishi Valmiki in Ayodhya, a waiting room named after Shri Ram's friend Nishadraj, and a restaurant named after Mata Shabari. They have also installed a 56-foot statue in honour of Nishadraj in Prayagraj," he pointed out, stressing that no follower of Nishadraj can align with the traitors of Ram. *—PTI*

FIGHT FOR PATLIPUTRA

Thrice unlucky Lalu family seeks to break jinx

PATNA, 28 MAY

The RJD seeks to break the jinx in Bihar's Pataliputra Lok Sabha constituency, covering rural areas around the state capital, which the party's proverbial first family has been failing to win since the seat's inception.

The constituency came into being after delimitation of 2008 and in Lok Sabha polls a year later, RJD's founding President Lalu Prasad chose to enter the fray himself, only to suffer a shocking defeat at the hands of Ranjan Yadav, a former close aide who had revolted and contested as a candidate of JD(U) headed by arch rival and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav holds a campaign supporting the party candidate from Patliputra seat Misa Bharti on Tuesday **PHOTO: ANI**

The family seems to have hardened its resolve following the three successive defeats, all with margins of about 40,000 votes or less.

Misa Bharti, the eldest daughter of Prasad, despite enjoying a second consecutive term in the Rajya Sabha, is out in the heat and dust of a direct election, like the fabled King Bruce who drew inspiration from a spider.

Her mother Rabri Devi, a former Chief Minister who has been carrying out a door-to-door campaign, spends much of her time pacifying common folks' complaint that "Didi" comes only once every five years.

However, Bharti seems to be taking the criticism in her stride and pinning her hopes on the incumbency factor and the buzz generated by the promise of "rozgar" by the INDIA bloc that she represents.

RJD supremo Prasad on Tuesday took a jibe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reported "God sent" remark and claimed that INDIA bloc will form government at the Centre after 4 June.

The results of Lok Sabha elections will be announced on 4 June. Lalu said, "Modi calls him 'avtar' (messenger of god). He (Modi) says he is not biological but a messenger of God. We will know the results soon. Modi is gone now. We will form the government on 4 June." *—PTI*

Remal: 9 dead as rains unleash chaos in North East

IMD warns of heavy rainfall across Assam & Meghalaya

A school bus damaged by a tree that fell in a storm following the landfall of Cyclone Remal, at Dhekiajuli, in Sonitpur, Assam on Tuesday PHOTO: PTI

GUWAHATI, 28 MAY

Nine people died as heavy rain lashed Assam, Nagaland and Meghalaya in the aftermath of Cyclone Remal, officials said on Tuesday. Three people were killed and 17 others injured in separate incidents as heavy rains accompanied by strong winds, as an impact of cyclone Remal, left a trail of destruction in Assam on Tuesday, officials said.

One person, identified as Putul Gogoi, died in a landslide caused by incessant rains at the under-construction NHPC's Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Power project at Gerukamukh in Lakhimpur district, they said.

Two people died and over 500 others were injured as heavy rain lashed Meghalaya in the aftermath of Cyclone Remal, officials said on Tuesday. One death was reported from East Jaintia Hills and another in a car accident in East Khasi Hills district, they said. The relentless downpour in the past 24 hours has affected around 17 villages and damaged several houses, a State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) report said.

At least four deaths and damage to more than 40 houses have been reported in Nagaland in the aftermath of Cyclone Remal, a senior official said.A seven-year-old boy drowned at Laruri village under Meluri subdivision following heavy rainfall under the impact of the cyclone, while two other drowning incidents were reported from Doyang Dam in Wokha district on Monday, he said. Power supply was disrupted in lower Assam as electric poles fell, and water-logging was reported from different towns, officials said.

Among the affected districts in Assam were Kamrup (Metro), Dhubri, South Salmara, Goalpara, Kamrup, Morigaon, Nagaon, Hojai, Sonitpur, Bongaigaon, Darrang and Dima Hasao, they said.Schools and other educational institutions were shut in Morigaon, Nagaon and Dima Hasao until further orders.The India Meteorological Department (IMD) warned of extremely heavy rainfall across the state as an impact of the cyclone.

Because of the weather, ferry services were stopped in Guwahati, Jorhat, Tezpur, Morigaon, Dhubri, Goalpara, South Salmara, Barpeta, Cachar and Karimganj districts.

The Assam State Disaster Management Authority asked people to avoid staying in vulnerable structures, avoid going to water-logged areas, stock up on essential items and contact authorities in case of an emergency. —PTI

Rain affects normal life in Manipur

Imphal, 28 May

Incessant heavy rainfall inundated several areas of Manipur on Tuesday affecting normal life, officials said. Heavy train triggered a mudslide near Sinam village in Kangpokpi district on NH 37 Imphal-Silchar highway sweeping off a truck into a gorge. Several other trucks have been left stranded waiting for excavators to clear the debris, officials said.

IMD issues red alert for Arunachal

With the IMD issuing a red alert for Arunachal Pradesh with a forecast of extremely heavy rainfall, Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Tuesday requested the people of the state to take all precautionary measures and avoid vulnerable and isolated locations. The IMD has predicted extremely heavy rainfall in isolated places. —PTI

Concretisation has worsened heat: CSE

Average humidity has risen by 5-10%

People lay in water for to get respite from the scorching heat, on a hot summer day, in Jammu on Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Increasing concretisation and humidity levels are exacerbating heat stress in India's megacities, which are not cooling down at night at the same rate as a decade ago, according to a new report by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

The CSE analysed summer air temperature, land surface temperature, and relative humidity data for six megacities -- Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai -- from January 2001 to April 2024.

The think tank found that increased humidity is worsening heat stress across all climate zones, even nullifying the marginal drop in air temperatures in Delhi and Hyderabad.

Barring Bengaluru, summertime average relative humidity has increased by 5-10 per cent in the other five megacities from 2014-2023 compared to the 2001-2010 average.

The CSE report comes at a time when blistering heatwaves are affecting health and livelihoods in large parts of India.

"Assessing the changing trend in heat, relative humidity, and land surface temperature along with day and nighttime temperatures is necessary to develop a comprehensive heat management plan for urban centres," said Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director of research and advocacy at CSE.

Avikal Somvanshi, senior programme manager at CSE's Urban Lab, said addressing the combination of high heat and humidity is particularly important as it can compromise the human body's main cooling mechanism, sweating. —PTI

R'than records highest temp at 50.5 deg C

Jaipur, 28 May

Heat conditions intensified in Rajasthan, with Churu recording the highest temperature at 50.5 degrees Celsius, 7.5 degrees above normal and the highest of the season, the local weather office said on Tuesday. According to the Meteorological Centre, Jaipur, Churu saw its highest temperature at 50.8 degrees Celsius on 1 June, 2019.

Heatwave to persist in Jammu for next week

Intense heatwave conditions will continue in Jammu for the next seven days, the meteorological department here said on Tuesday. Jammu on Monday recorded a high of 43 degrees Celsius, while the minimum temperature remained near normal at 25 degrees Celsius. —PTI

2 students killed after truck knocks them down in Pune

PUNE, 28 MAY

Two engineering students riding a motorbike were killed after a truck knocked them down in Maharashtra's Pune city, police said on Tuesday. The driver of the truck, after hitting the motorbike on Monday night, did not stop and tried to run away but was caught some distance away and arrested, they said. The incident took place at around 10.30pm on Monday in Chandan Nagar area on Pune-Ahmednagar road when three students, in their early 20s and studying at an engineering college here, were on way to the Pune railway station, the police said.Two of them were to go to their hometown Latur in Maharashtra.

—PTI

Video of Jain monks being harassed goes viral

DEHRADUN, 28 MAY

A video of a man harassing two Digambar Jain monks in Uttarakhand has gone viral on social media, following which the police have formed a Special Task Force to probe the incident, a senior official said on Tuesday. The culprit is a resident of the Tehri district. He has been booked under sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Information Technology Act, Uttarakhand Director General of Police Abhinav Kumar said. In the video, the monks are seen sitting on a roadside parapet while the man stands in front of them. He can be heard pestering them with questions like why they move in public without any clothes.—PTI

Umar Khalid to stay in jail as court junks bail plea

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

A Delhi court on Tuesday dismissed the bail plea of former JNU student Umar Khalid who is accused in the alleged larger conspiracy behind the 2020 northeast Delhi communal riots. Khalid has been booked under the UAPA. Additional Sessions Judge Sameer Bajpai rejected the bail plea. The detailed order is awaited. —PTI

DRIVER ALLEGEDLY KIDNAPPED

Minor's father under police custody in Porsche crash case

PUNE, 28 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

A Pune court on Tuesday remanded the father of a juvenile allegedly involved in the Porsche car crash in police custody till May 31 in a case of alleged kidnapping and wrongful confinement of the family driver.

The court also extended the police custody of the juvenile's grandfather till 31 May in the same case.

Both the accused were produced before Judicial Magistrate First Class AA Pande.

They have been booked under Indian Penal Code sections 365 (kidnapping) and 368 (wrongfully concealing or keeping in confinement).

Two IT professionals died after their motorcycle was hit by a speeding Porsche allegedly driven by the minor in the early hours of May 19 in the Kalyani Nagar area of Pune city.

The police claim the teenager was drunk at the time of the accident.

The juvenile's father, realtor Vishal Agarwal,50, is already in judicial custody in a case registered against him and the managers and owners of two pubs under the Juvenile Justice Act.

The police have alleged that Vishal Agrawal and his father Surendra Agrawal,77, pressure on the driver to take the blame for the accident by offering him money and giving him threats.

Surendra Agrawal was arrested in this connection on May 25 and then remanded in police custody till May 28.

A court here on Monday allowed the police to take Vishal Agrawal's custody in connection with the case of kidnapping and wrongful confinement of their driver.

The police subsequently took his custody from the Yerwada Central Prison and arrested him in that case. —PTI

Fire tragedy: One more partner of Rajkot game zone arrested

AHMEDABAD, 28 MAY

The Gujarat police have arrested one more partner of the Rajkot-based TRP game zone where a devastating fire last week killed 27 people, an official said on Tuesday.

Dhaval Thakkar, the proprietor of Dhaval Corporation, which ran the TRP game zone along with five partners of Raceway Enterprises, was arrested from Abu Road in neighbouring Rajasthan, Banaskantha Superintendent of Police Akshayraj Makwana said.

With this, four people have so far been arrested in connection with the fire incident at the game zone on Saturday.

Police visits the game zone site in Rajkot PHOTO: PTI

The police had earlier arrested Yuvrajsinh Solanki and Rahul Rathod, partners in the Raceway Enterprises, and game zone manager Nitin Jain.

They were on Monday sent to 14-day police custody by a court in Rajkot. The police have registered a First Information Report (FIR) against six people - Thakkar, Solanki, Rathod, and Raceway Enterprises partners Ashoksinh Jadeja, Kiritsinh Jadeja and Prakashchand Hiran - in connection with the fire incident. —PTI

DOMBIVILI BLAST OCCURRED IN REACTOR: MIN

THANE, 28 MAY

Maharashtra Labour Minister Suresh Khade has said the blast in a chemical factory at Dombivli in Thane district last week occurred in a reactor and not a boiler.

An expert team from New Delhi will conduct a probe to ascertain the exact cause of the blast, Khade told reporters after visiting the incident site on Monday.

The blast at Amudan Chemicals unit on 23 May claimed 10 lives and left more than 60 people injured, as per officials. —PTI

15 NAXALS HELD AFTER IED BLAST IN CHHATTISGARH

DANTEWADA, 28 MAY

As many as 15 Naxalites, seven of them women, were arrested following an IED blast in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district, police said on Tuesday.

The Naxalites triggered the explosion when the security forces were o n a search operation on Sunday, but no one was injured, they said.The Naxalites were apprehended near Gumalnar village under Geedam police station limits, where a joint team of District Reserve Guard (DRG) and Bastar Fighters, both units of state police, was out on a search operation on Sunday, Police (DSP) Unnati Thakur told reporters. —PTI

Prime accused who conspired Pune law student's murder arrested

PATNA, 28 MAY

Bihar Police on Tuesday claimed to have arrested the prime accused in the brutal murder of a final year undergraduate student of BN College on the law college campus of Patna University.

The arrested accused has been identified as Chandan Kumar, a final-year student of Patna college and a resident of Bihta, Patna.

Police claimed, that Kumar, who was residing in Jackson hostel of Patna college, hatched the conspiracy to kill Harsh Raj, a student of BN College, Patna University, on Monday.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Patna, Rajeev Mishra told PTI, "Chandan Kumar is the prime accused in the case. His further interrogation is on".

PHOTO: PTI

Harsh Raj,22, a final year undergraduate student, was beaten to death by some unidentified persons on the law college campus of Patna University on Monday.

The incident had taken place when the 22-year-old student was coming out from his examination centre in the afternoon. He had gone to appear for his graduation examination on the law college campus and was beaten up by a group of students. He was injured. The police took him to the hospital, where he died during treatment.

According to a statement issued by the Patna Police, "Soon after the incident, the district police formed a SIT and nabbed Chandan Kumar, who allegedly hatched the conspiracy, on Tuesday. During custodial interrogation, Kumar confessed to have committed the crime. He has also revealed the identity of other accused involved in the case". —PTI

650 Badrinath pilgrims sent back for not registering

GOPESHWAR, 28 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

More than 650 pilgrims travelling to Badrinath were forced to return without paying obeisance at the temple as they did not fulfil the mandatory registration norm, officials said on Tuesday.

Adequate steps are being taken to regulate the rush of pilgrims to Char Dham and avoid the chaos that occurred at the Himalayan temples during the initial days of the yatra, they said.

Strict adherence to mandatory registration prior to visiting the temples is being ensured so that the devotees are not inconvenienced, they added.

Over 650 pilgrims bound for Badrinath had to return from Gauchar checkpost without paying obeisance at the temple as they did not do the mandatory prior registration, the SSP office in Chamoli informed. As many as 120 vehicles in which the unregistered pilgrims had been brought were also sent back, it said.

Action has also been taken against five vehicle operators who carried unregistered pilgrims to Badrinath, the SSP office said.

On an average 20,000 pilgrims visit the temple every day for darshan. Since its gates were opened for this year on 12 May, 22 pilgrims have died so far due to cardiac problems.

Top officials of Uttarakhand, have appealed to yatris not to arrive without registration. —PTI

CHENNAI BASED STARTUP

Agnikul calls off testing of 3D-printed rocket

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Chennai-based space start-up Agnikul Cosmos on Tuesday called off the maiden launch of its 3D-printed, semi-cryogenic Agnibaan rocket yet again due to technical glitches detected seconds before lift-off.

The IIT-Chennai incubated start-up made two renewed attempts at launch from its own launch pad at Sriharikota -- first around 5.30am and another at 9.25am -- which had to be put on hold due to problems in the Hold Down Release Mechanism (HDRM) and igniter failure, respectively.The second attempt on Tuesday was put on "temporary hold to check igniter performance" just five seconds before lift-off.

Agnibaan is a customisable, two-stage launch vehicle that can carry a payload of up to 300kg PHOTO: X

This was the fourth attempt by Agnikul to launch the Agnibaan Sub-Orbital Technology Demonstrator (SOrTeD) since 22 March, when the test flight was first scheduled to be held at the Agnikul Launch Pad at ISRO's Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota.

The start-up made the second attempt to launch the rocket on 6 April, which was called off during the pre-launch checks. The third attempt was made on 7 April, which had to be called off within a second of the commencement of the automated launch sequence due to communication issues with the onboard software.

Agnikul is seeking to conduct India's second private rocket launch, following start-up Skyroot Aerospace's November 2022 launch of the Vikram-S sub-orbital rocket in its maiden attempt.

Agnibaan is a customisable, two-stage launch vehicle that can carry a payload of up to 300kg. —PTI

CYCLONE REMAL

Villagers shift cows to safe place from flood-hit Baldakhal village after the landfall of the Cyclone Remal, on the outskirts of Agartala
PHOTO: PTI

BJP volunteers target 1L people a day for votes

Ankur Rana types furiously into his phone, sending messages across the hundreds of WhatsApp groups he manages.

"I have 400-450 WhatsApp groups which each have about 200-300 members. Apart from this, I have about 5,000 direct contacts. In this way, I personally reach 10-15,000 people every day," the social media coordinator for BJP in the Meerut parliamentary constituency in western Uttar Pradesh explained in the run-up to voting last month.

He was part of a crack team set up to ensure the BJP gets its message out to millions of voters - groups which are then replicated across dozens of constituencies in Uttar Pradesh alone.

The scale of the operation is eye-watering, but then the BJP have identified WhatsApp - along with other messaging and social media apps - as a key route to reach their ambitious target of 370 seats in this year's Lok Sabha election.

And that is for good reason: India is WhatsApp's biggest market globally with more than half a billion users who spend several hours a day on the messaging platform. hey forward everything from "good morning" to memes - and, crucially, political commentary in different languages.

And volunteers like Ankur are a key cog of the election machine, trying to ensure that the BJP's messaging is part of all that.

BBC spoke to 10 other BJP volunteers who also work as constituency social media coordinators in Uttar Pradesh and they all said they run hundreds of WhatsApp groups, with members ranging from 200 to 2,000 each.

From there, the messages reach 180 Meerut constituency volunteers, including Ankur. These volunteers distribute messages further down the chain, and it eventually reaches those managing the campaign for each polling booth.

WhatsApp is particularly useful in reaching the young, says Ankur, who runs a digital marketing company in Mumbai when not doing unpaid volunteering for BJP.

Volunteers from the BJP office in Meerut sent thousands of messages to people every day ***PHOTO: BBC***

The over-40s, he reveals, are more active on Facebook.

"On average, our target is to reach 100,000-150,000 new people each day," he says.

Experts note that when it comes to social media, the BJP's seemingly unparalleled social media campaign appears to be pulling away from its rivals.

But none of it works without the personal touch, party activists say - especially as they need to get people's numbers in the first place.

But as everyone knows, when it comes to the internet, keeping total control of the narrative is nigh on impossible.

And when that narrative is being shared on private WhatsApp accounts and groups, it is also extremely difficult to know exactly what is being shared - and where it came from in the first place.

One viral message that was forwarded many times in several groups the BBC saw included claims accusing the Congress party of carrying out appeasement of the Muslim minority.

In Hindi it read: "Congress had already converted India into an Islamic country, they just never officially announced it". The message went on to list 18 ways in which it was claimed that the Congress favours the Muslim community.

Its origins are impossible to establish, but the fact is it does mirror comments made by BJP leadership during election rallies in recent weeks.

In April, Modi himself was accused of Islamophobia after claiming in rallies that the opposition would distribute people's wealth to "infiltrators" if they won power, in remarks referring to Muslims.

BJP's own social media handles have shared animated videos repeating the point, and its leaders have wrongly claimed that this is written in the Congress's manifesto. The document does not mention redistributing wealth or the word Muslims.

Kiran Garimella, assistant professor at Rutgers University, who is researching the use of WhatsApp in India, says that the official narrative of political parties is often mirrored on private groups - but then, it becomes difficult to unpick what is official, and what is unofficial.

And while messages might originate on one platform, they can end up circulating across other media as well, convincing people that what they see is the truth.

In a recent campaign advertisement, BJP implied that Modi had got Russia's war in Ukraine paused to evacuate Indian students stuck there amidst the fighting.

Two years on, BJP's top leaders have mentioned it during the election campaign and the ad was widely viewed on social media. BJP didn't respond to a question on why it was repeating the claim.

Outside Meerut University, we met students in their early 20s who are first-time voters. We asked them whether they had heard the claim, and what they believed.

We asked the same question to people in a nearby village, many of whom had seen the claim being made on TV news.

"Yes, the war was stopped because Modi is respected globally," said Sanjeev Kashyap, a 41-year-old farmer.

"Look, we have heard the war was stopped. We have not gone to see for ourselves. But I think there must be some truth in it," said 75-year-old Jagdish Chaudhury. Four other villagers agreed with him. It's a crucial power - being able to influence what people believe. *—BBC News*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Heatwaves are causing rise in premature births

A new research has linked an increase in premature births during hot weather conditions to intense and prolonged heatwaves.

A team of researchers, including those at the University of Nevada, estimated changes in the rate of preterm and early-term birth in response to heatwaves.

A heatwave is a period of extremely high temperatures relative to what is normally expected over a region.

The researchers analysed 5.3 crore births across the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the US over a 25-year period (1993-2017) in terms of daily counts of preterm and early-term births.

While a full-term pregnancy lasts for about 40 weeks, babies born before 37 weeks are preterm births and those delivered between 37 and 39 weeks of the pregnancy are early-term births.

The researchers found that over the 25-year period, preterm births increased by 2 per cent, while early-term births increased by 1 per cent, following a four consecutive day-period during which each day's average temperature was among the hottest 2.5 per cent for that region.

"Each 1 degree Celsius increase in mean temperature above the threshold was associated with a 1 per cent increase in the rate of both preterm and early-term birth," the authors wrote in the study published in The Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA) Network Open.

Extreme heat events have implications for perinatal health, according to the study ***PHOTO: ANI***

The research also found that for the same exposure to heatwaves, preterm and early-term births increased by more numbers in women younger than 30 years of age, having lower education levels and belonging to minority groups.

They analysed the pregnancies of mothers with high school education or less, from a racial minority group or of Hispanic ethnicity, and age younger than 30 years.

"Among this group, the rate ratio for preterm birth was 1.04, and the rate ratio for early-term birth was 1.03 after 4 consecutive hot days," the authors wrote.

"Increases (in preterm and early-term birth rates) were more pronounced for heatwaves of longer duration and higher temperatures and among population subgroups associated with lower socioeconomic status," they wrote.

The team also wrote that "modest but robust elevated associations were the strongest in the 4 days preceding birth and for longer durations of heat and higher temperatures."

According to the researchers, this was the first study to provide compelling population-level evidence of increased preterm and early-term birth rates in response to heat waves.

Using national birth data over the recent decades, the study was the largest one to date addressing this aspect, they said.

"Extreme heat events have implications for perinatal health. The findings also add to evidence that the effects of extreme heat events are not distributed evenly among population subgroups," the authors wrote.

The 5.3 crore births that were analysed formed roughly half of all US births between 1993 and 2017, according to the authors. Data was included from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *—PTI*

Each 1 degree Celsius increase in mean temperature above the threshold was associated with a 1 per cent increase in the rate of both preterm and early-term birth ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

ISRO's journey from discovering water on the moon to fostering startups

Fifteen years ago, in April 2009, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launched its first radar imaging satellite, the RISAT-2. While the numbering suggests an earlier RISAT-1, that satellite was launched later in 2012.

One of the immediate reasons for this was the urgent need for greater all-weather surveillance from space after the Mumbai terror attacks of November 2008. The RISAT-2 was an earth observation satellite equipped with synthetic-aperture radar (SAR) technology. Apart from surveillance, it had applications in agriculture, forestry, soil moisture estimation, and disaster management. SAR technology allowed it to capture high-resolution images.

Fast forward to 2024, on 1 May, GalaxEye, a Bengaluru startup, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe), an autonomous agency under the Department of Space, to use ISRO's co-working and testing facilities for the indigenous SAR and MSI (multi spectral imaging) technology it is developing.

"This partnership marks a transformative chapter not only for GalaxEye but for the entire field of space exploration," wrote Suyash Singh, co-founder and CEO of GalaxEye, in a blog after announcing the MoU.

He isn't off the mark. In future, new generations will look back at this time in the history of India's space faring efforts to say how ISRO fostered the country's fledgling private space tech ecosystem. This, in the long run, will likely be ISRO's greatest contribution, beyond its own great missions.

GalaxEye is only the latest private, venture capital-funded space-tech startup in India to strike a partnership like this with ISRO. From earth observations satellites to satellite launch vehicles to in-space propulsion systems, a whole ecosystem of private space-tech ventures is slowly emerging in India, with ISRO's invaluable support.

Among such startups, Skyroot Aerospace has successfully launch-tested its first technology demonstrator rocket. Agnikul Cosmos is expected to test its first rocket soon.

Bellatrix Aerospace is planning a state-of-the-art factory in Bengaluru to build its in-space propulsion systems. It has put in space the first of these products to demonstrate its capabilities.

In 2023, GalaxEye built India's first indigenous drone equipped with SAR technology. It is now working on building a private constellation of earth observation satellites. The company is looking at launching its first satellite to be called Drishti Mission in the next 12 months.

ISRO has launched 381 satellites for 34 countries over the last two decades ***PHOTO: ISRO***

This satellite will be India's first and the world's highest-resolution multi-sensor imaging satellite, according to GalaxEye.

Over the last 15 years, ISRO's achievements and milestones are nothing short of breathtaking. Some of the noteworthy ones are Chandrayaan-1, GSAT-4, Mangalyaan, the Mars orbiter, GSAT-9, GSAT-19 and GSAT-29, Chandrayaan-2, PSLV-C51/RISAT-1A, and of course the spectacular success of Chandrayaan-3.

Chandrayaan-1 was India's first mission to the Moon, launched in October 2008, with several major discoveries and data analysis in 2009.

Chandrayaan-2, launched in July 2019, was an attempt at sending a lander to the lunar surface and search for water ice on the Moon's south pole. The lander, Vikram, lost communication during the landing attempt, but the orbiter continues to study the Moon.

Chandrayaan-3 wiped away the disappointment of the previous attempt when it put a lander on the Moon and out trundled a rover, named Pragyan, in a flawless execution in August 2023.

With Gaganyaan, India's first manned mission to space announced in 2018, ISRO is targeting a crewed flight in 2025, to demonstrate India's capability to send humans to space and safely return them. In February, four air force pilots were named to be the astronauts on this mission, which will eventually take three of them to an orbit of 400 km and return them after three days.

Circling back to space tech commercialisation, in February 2017, ISRO set a world record by launching 104 satellites in a single mission using the PSLV-C37 rocket. Since then, ISRO has offered its capabilities to multiple customers around the world. A recent notable launch was when the Indian space agency launched 36 satellites for the UK's OneWeb, a satellite constellation company backed by investors including India's Bharti Enterprises.

The launch, in March 2023, was the second such successful commercial launch from India for OneWeb. The launch deal was struck via NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), which is another important part of the story of how ISRO's capabilities are underpinning India's expansion global commercial space operations as well.

With this launch of LVM3, the rocket that carried the satellites, through NSIL, "ISRO is confident of handling many more such launches on demand for both LEO and GEO mission in the future," he added.

The establishment in March 2019 of NSIL, the commercial arm of ISRO, as a wholly owned Government of India company under the Department of Space, and IN-SPACe in June 2020 created a powerful combination that set the ball rolling on India's opening up of ISRO to the private sector.

This paves the way for private participants to step up their efforts to partner ISRO.

—Courtesy Forbes

PHOTO: X/@WELLANDTRIBUNE

Typhoon leaves at least 7 dead in Philippines

MANILA, 28 MAY

A typhoon has finally moved away from the Philippines, leaving at least seven people dead, mostly due to floods or toppled trees, and forcing the closures of several seaports, stranding thousands of passengers, officials said Tuesday. Typhoon Ewiniar crept by the country's eastern coast late Friday night and lingered over the Philippine islands for several days, before shifting northeastward away from the archipelago. All storm warnings were lifted Tuesday. The typhoon's shift in direction spared the densely populated capital, Manila, from a potentially damaging hit. Ewiniar, locally known as Aghon, was last tracked Tuesday about 450 kilometers east of the northern town of Basco in Batanes province with sustained winds of 130 kph and gusts of up to 160 kph, according to government forecasters. At least six villagers drowned. *—PTI*

Pope Francis uses 'homophobic' slur in meeting

ROME, 28 MAY

Pope Francis used a homophobic slur during a meeting with Italian bishops, as he reiterated that gay men should not be allowed to become priests, according to Italian media. The La Repubblica and Corriere della Sera newspapers reported on Monday that the 87-year-old Pope made the derogatory remark in a private meeting a week ago when he was asked whether gay men should be allowed to train for the priesthood provided, they remained celibate. Pope Francis said they should not and joked that there were "already too many "frociaggine" in some seminaries. In English, the term roughly translates to f****. Corriere della Sera reported that some of those present felt that the Pope, whose first language is Spanish, did not realise how offensive the word was.*—PTI*

PoK: Retired govt employees protest, seek pension hike

MUZAFFARABAD, 28 MAY

Several retired government officials from multiple departments on Monday staged a protest in front of the Prime Minister's Secretariat of Pakistan-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoK) at Muzaffarabad. The protestors demanded the urgent approval of increased pensions as per the skyrocketing inflation. The protest was led by the former secretary of PoK's PWD, Mushtaq Awan. Additionally, these protesting officials of PoK also raised their demands for medical benefits that are currently available to the officials of Punjab Province in Pakistan. *—ANI*

Nawaz Sharif set to be re-elected as PML-N Prez

LAHORE, 28 MAY

Three-time former prime minister Nawaz Sharif is set to be re-elected as the President of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party here on Tuesday, six years after losing the post following a Supreme Court ruling in the Panama Papers case. The Dawn newspaper reported that the General Council meeting is set to take place at a local hotel. It is likely that the veteran politician, who returned to Pakistan in October last year after a four-year self-imposed exile in the UK, will be elected unopposed even though as many as 11 party members have received the nomination papers for the top post, the report said. PML-N announced convening the general council meeting on 11 May but it was postponed to coincide with the celebration of 26 years of Pakistan becoming a nuclear power. *—PTI*

EU to push military aid for Ukraine

Belgian PM commits $1 billion to Ukraine

BRUSSELS, 28 MAY

European Union defence ministers are meeting in Brussels Tuesday to try again to overcome Hungary's objections to providing billions of euros in military aid to Kyiv, in its third year of war since Russia's full-scale invasion began.

This comes as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is to inspect the F-16 jets Belgium will send to his country. He is on a whirlwind two-day tour of Spain, Belgium and Portugal to drum up other support.

An estimated 6.5 billion euros are stalled by the Hungarian government of Prime Minister Viktor Orban, considered Russia's staunchest ally in the 27-nation bloc. Single-member states have wide veto powers and Hungary has long held up funds aimed at boosting Ukraine's defence efforts.

"We need all these critical decisions and still there are too many decisions which are not made," Estonian defence minister, Hanno Pevkur, told reporters ahead of the meeting. "The urgency is very, very acute." Zelenskyy successfully secured Monday a Spanish pledge for additional air defence missiles to help fight the nearly 3,000 bombs that he says Russia launches against Ukraine every month.

Still, Ukraine urgently needs another seven US-made Patriot air defence systems to stop Russia from hitting the power grid and civilian areas, as well as military targets, with devastating glide bombs that wreak wide destruction, Zelenskyy said.

The Ukrainian president and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez signed a bilateral security agreement that allocates 1 billion euros ($1.1 billion) of military aid to Ukraine in 2024, and 5 billion euros ($5.4 billion) by 2027. More Leopard tanks and artillery ammunition are also included in the package. He was set to visit Belgium and Spain earlier this month but postponed all his foreign trips after Russia launched its offensive in the Kharkiv region. Ukraine has repeatedly tried to strike behind Russian lines, often with drones, though Russia's response to the new technology used in unmanned vehicles has improved in recent months.

The onslaught unfolding as the weather improves has brought Ukraine's biggest military test since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Slow deliveries of support by its Western partners, especially a lengthy delay in US military aid, have left Ukraine at the mercy of Russia's bigger army and air force. *—AP*

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is welcomed by Belgium's Prime Minister Alexender De Croo **PHOTO: PTI**

AT LEAST 45 KILLED

Rafah strike was a 'tragic mishap', says Netanyahu

Children light candles during a march against Israel and in solidarity with Palestinians in the southern Gaza city of Rafah **PHOTO: PTI**

TEL AVIV, 28 MAY

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu acknowledged Monday that a "tragic mistake" had been made after an Israeli strike in the southern Gaza city of Rafah set fire to a tent camp housing displaced Palestinians and, according to local officials, killed at least 45 people.

"Despite our utmost efforts not to harm innocent civilians, last night, there was a tragic mistake," Netanyahu said Monday in an address to Israel's parliament. "We are investigating the incident and will obtain a conclusion because this is our policy." The ministry said the dead included at least 12 women, eight children and three older adults, with another three bodies burned beyond recognition. Netanyahu did not elaborate on the error. Israel's military initially said it had carried out a precise airstrike. *—AP*

Israeli forces arrest 22 Palestinians

The arrests included a child and former prisoners, according to the Commission of Detainees Palestinian Prisoner's Society. Raids took place in Ramallah, Bethlehem, and in many other places. *—Al Jazeera*

SPAIN'S NOD TO STATEHOOD FOR PALESTINE

MADRID, 28 MAY

Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said the Spanish Cabinet will recognise a Palestinian state at its Tuesday morning meeting as a European Union rift with Israel widens.

Ireland and Norway were also to make official their recognition of a Palestinian state later in the day. While dozens of countries have recognised a Palestinian state, none of the major Western powers has done so.

"This is a historic decision that has a single goal, and that is to help Israelis and Palestinians achieve peace," said Sánchez, standing at the gates of the prime minister's palace in Madrid, during a televised speech. The Socialist leader, who announced his country's decision before parliament last week, has spent months touring European and Middle Eastern countries to garner support for recognition. *—AP*

UK PM Sunak pledges tax cuts for pensioners

LONDON, 28 MAY

Rishi Sunak **PHOTO: PTI**

United Kingdom Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has pledged to cut taxes for millions of pensioners as he seeks to turn around his Conservative Party's dismal poll numbers ahead of general elections in July.

Under the plans announced on Monday, the tax-free allowance for pensioners would increase by at least 2.5 percent, or in line with the highest of average earnings or inflation.

The proposals would see some 8 million pensioners pay about $128 less tax in 2025 and about 275 pounds less annually from 2030. Under a so-called triple lock introduced by the Conservatives in 2011, the state pension already rises either by 2.5 percent or in line with average earnings – whichever is highest – but income tax thresholds have been frozen since 2021.

The opposition Labour Party, which is widely tipped to take power after 14 years in opposition, has committed to keep the triple-lock guarantee for at least five years if elected. Sunak said the "bold action" showed that his party was on the side of pensioners.

"I passionately believe that those who have worked hard all their lives should have peace of mind and security in retirement," he said. Labour Shadow Paymaster General Jonathan Ashworth slammed the announcement as "another desperate move from a chaotic Tory party torching any remaining facade of its claims to economic credibility".

"Not only have they promised to spend tens of billions of pounds since this campaign began, they also have a completely unfunded $59 bn policy to scrap national insurance that threatens the very basis of the state pension," Ashworth said. Following months of speculation, Sunak on Wednesday called an election for 4 July, months earlier than expected by most observers.

Opinion polls have for months shown the Conservatives lagging Labour by about 20 percentage points amid voter discontent over high inflation, weak economic growth and a series of political scandals. *—AP*

POLITICAL TURMOIL

Taiwan passes Bill curbing Prez powers despite protests

TAIPEI, 28 MAY

Taiwan's lawmakers passed legislation on Tuesday that could curb the authority of President Lai Ching-te, as thousands of protesters gathered outside Parliament to oppose the changes.

The controversial measure became law following a day of raucous debates and scuffles between Lai's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and Opposition groups, which saw one lawmaker's T-shirt ripped. That contrasted with demonstrations outside Parliament, which remained peaceful though lively.

Anger at the measures has already sparked violent clashes inside the legislature and some of Taiwan's largest protests since the 2014 Sunflower student movement, when protesters stormed and occupied Parliament, blocking the passage of an unpopular trade pact with China.

People are again assembling in the streets around Parliament, amid concern the Opposition Kuomintang (KMT) and its Taiwan People's Party (TPP) allies will manage to pass the legislation on 28 May.

Anger at the measures has already sparked violent clashes inside the legislature **PHOTO: BLOOMBERG**

"Even if democracy is dead, we will not stop fighting," protesters shouted. The changes would expand lawmakers' ability to summon the President, companies and even the general public for questioning. It would also give them access to confidential documents.

There are concerns those powers could let lawmakers derail President Lai's agenda, and lead to leaks of sensitive information and punishments for those who refuse to answer questions. Taiwan already has the Control Yuan, a supervisory branch of government with the power to investigate and impeach officials.

Lai was sworn in as President on 20 May, and the amendments could impair his ability to enact policies on the island that sits at the heart of China-US tensions.

KMT, which advocates closer relations with China, has pushed back at suggestions the law is the result of outside influence. *—Bloomberg*

THOUSANDS OF AMERICANS WITHOUT POWER

WASHINGTON, 28 MAY

Nearly 200,000 people across several American states remain without power after an onslaught of deadly tornadoes and thunderstorms.

The severe weather killed at least 23 people over the Memorial Day holiday weekend, injuring hundreds of others and leaving a path of destruction across a swathe of the US. Forecasters are continuing to warn of strong thunderstorms and flash flooding across northern and central parts of Texas.

Meanwhile, southern areas of the state are sweltering under extreme heat, as is the south of Florida.

Although this heat is gradually abating, near-record highs remain possible, the National Weather Service (NWS) says. In a Tuesday morning update, the NWS warned of "significant damaging wind and large hail" in Texas. The threat there, and in southern Oklahoma, extends to Wednesday. The NWS earlier said heavy rain was expected up and down the east coast - from New York to Maryland - and with it, a slight of risk of thunderstorms in those areas. *—BBC News*

New Guinea may face another disaster

MELBOURNE, 28 MAY

Authorities fear a second landslide and a disease outbreak are looming at the scene of Papua New Guinea's mass-casualty disaster because of water streams and bodies trapped beneath the tons of debris that swept over a village, a United Nations official said Tuesday.

A mass of boulders, earth and splintered trees devastated Yambali in the South Pacific nation's remote highlands when a limestone mountainside sheared away Friday. The blanket of debris has become more unstable with recent rain and streams trapped between the ground and rubble, said Serhan Aktoprak, chief of the International Organisation for Migration's mission in Papua New Guinea.

The UN agency has officials at the scene in Enga province helping shelter 1,600 displaced people.

India announces $1 million relief assistance

India on Tuesday announced an immediate relief assistance of US$ 1 million to support relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in Papua New Guinea which was devastated by a massive landslide on 24 May. *—AP/IANS*

Hajj: Syrians take direct flight after 10 years

DAMASCUS, 28 MAY

For the first time in over a decade, 270 Syrians travelled on a direct flight early Tuesday from Damascus to Saudi Arabia for the annual Islamic Hajj pilgrimage, the Syrian Transportation Ministry said.

The development is part of an ongoing thaw in relations between Damascus and Riyadh, which days ago appointed Saudi Arabia's first ambassador to war-torn Syria since severing ties in 2012. Syria was readmitted to the 22-member Arab League in 2023, after it had been suspended from the group for more than a decade over President Bashar Assad's brutal crackdown on anti-government protesters in 2011. A second plane of pilgrims is set to depart from Damascus to Jeddah late Tuesday, the ministry said. 1.8 million Muslims from around the world took part in last year's Hajj pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca, making it one of the world's largest religious gatherings. *—AP*

N Korean rocket carrying 2nd spy satellite explodes

SEOUL, 28 MAY

A rocket launched by North Korea to deploy the country's second spy satellite exploded shortly after liftoff Monday, state media reported, in a setback for leader Kim Jong Un's hopes to field satellites to monitor the US and South Korea.

Monday's failed launch came hours after leaders of South Korea, China and Japan met in Seoul in their first trilateral meeting in more than four years. It's highly unusual for North Korea to take provocative action when China, its major ally and economic pipeline, is engaging in high-level diplomacy in the region.

The launch drew rebukes from the North's neighbors because the UN bans North Korea from conducting any such launches, viewing them as covers for testing long-range missile technology.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said it launched a spy satellite aboard a new rocket at its main northwestern space center. But KCNA said the rocket blew up during a first-stage flight soon after liftoff due to a suspected engine problem.

KCNA cited the unidentified vice director of the National Aerospace Technology Administration as saying that a preliminary examination showed that the explosion was related to the reliability of operation of the newly developed liquid oxygen-petroleum engine. He said other possible causes will be investigated, according to KCNA.

Japan's government briefly issued a missile warning for the southern prefecture of Okinawa, urging residents to take shelter inside buildings and other safer places. The warning was lifted later because the region was no longer in danger, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said. *—AP*

UN REPORT REVEALS

Edu, safety nets vital for Asia to grow rich

TOKYO, 28 MAY

As economies in Asia and the Pacific slow and grow older, countries need to do more to ensure that workers get the education, training and social safety nets needed to raise incomes and ensure social equity, a United Nations report said Tuesday.

The report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) said that growth in productivity has slowed, hurting incomes and undermining the purchasing power of the region's 2 billion workers. By improving productivity, governments can boost incomes and better prepare for the aging of their work forces, the report said.

Two in three workers in the region were in informal employment in 2023, such as day labour, lacking the kinds of protections that come from formal jobs.

The report by said that growth in productivity has slowed **PHOTO: PTI**

"The lack of job opportunities that meet decent work criteria, including good incomes, not only jeopardises social justice in the region, but it also presents a risk factor for the labour market outlook," the report said.

Showing the potential for improvement, labour productivity grew at an average annual rate of 4.3 per cent in 2004-2021, helping to raise incomes per worker in terms of purchasing power parity, which compares standards of living in different countries using a common currency, to USD 15,700 from USD 7,700. But it has slowed in the past decade, the report said, hindering progress toward greater affluence.

It highlighted various challenges, especially unemployment among young people not in school, which is more than triple the adult rate, at 13.7 per cent.

Increasing use of artificial intelligence and other automation technology will cause some people to lose their jobs, it said, with women engaged in clerical and information technology work most likely to be affected as companies roll back their reliance on offshore call centres that have provided good quality jobs in countries like the Philippines and India.

The ratio of people in Asia aged older than 65 to those 15–64 years old is projected to double to nearly a third by 2050 from about 15 per cent in 2023, the ILO report says. *—AP*

PHOTO: PTI

BHEL allies with BARC to produce hydrogen energy

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) has signed an agreement with the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre for 50 kW alkaline electroliser system to produce hydrogen, the company informed the exchange in a filing. The technology for hydrogen production is developed indigenously by BHEL and has high local material content. BHEL through this collaboration with BARC intends to scale up Indigenous Alkaline Electrolyser Technology and commercialise it for application in sectors such as refineries, fertiliser, steel, transportation, etc. This will be a step further in BHEL's contribution to the 'National Green Hydrogen Mission' and 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' The shares of BHEL have also joined the other PSU's in the recent rally. *—ANI*

Rupee falls 5 paise lower at 83.18 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 28 MAY

The rupee pared initial gains and settled for the day 5 paise lower at 83.18 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, amid a negative trend in domestic equities and on dollar demand from importer at lower levels. Forex traders said rupee consolidated in a narrow range as elevated crude oil prices weighed on investor sentiments, while the decline in US dollar cushioned the downside. At interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit traded in a narrow range. It opened at 83.14 and touched an intra-day high of 83.10 and a low of 83.19. The domestic unit finally settled for the day at 83.18 down 5 paise from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee pared its initial gains and settled for the day lower by 3 paise at 83.13 against the US dollar. *—PTI*

Silver surges ₹3,100; gold rises by ₹130

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Silver rallied strongly by Rs 3,100 to Rs 95,950 per kg in the national capital on Tuesday, while gold went up Rs 130, in line with strong global trends. According to HDFC Securities, rising for the second straight session, silver prices surged Rs 3,100 to nearly a two-week high of Rs 95,950 per kg. It had closed at Rs 92,850 per kg on Monday. Meanwhile, the yellow metal prices climbed Rs 130 to Rs 72,950 per 10 grams. It had finished at Rs 72,820 per 10 grams in the previous session. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,346 per ounce, up USD 2 from the previous close. Silver also traded higher at USD 31.50 per ounce in the overseas markets. Meanwhile, in the futures trade on the MCX, gold fell Rs 169 to trade at Rs 71,840 per 10 grams. *—PTI*

TARC Ltd posts ₹52 crore net loss in Q1

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Realty firm TARC Ltd has posted a consolidated net loss of Rs 51.73 crore for the quarter ended March on lower income. The company had posted a net profit of Rs 1.56 crore in the year-ago period. Total income declined 92 per cent to Rs 10.36 crore in the fourth quarter of last fiscal from Rs 135.53 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year, according to a regulatory filing on Monday. Total income declined to Rs 121.40 crore in the last financial year from Rs 374.66 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal. TARC Ltd said it has achieved record sales bookings of Rs 1,612 crore in the 2023-24 fiscal. TARC Ltd is developing many luxury housing projects in the Delhi-NCR market. *—PTI*

Adani Enterprises to mop up Rs 16,600 cr via QIP

QIP is a way to raise capital without submitting paperwork

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Adani Enterprises Ltd, the flagship firm of billionaire Gautam Adani's conglomerate, on Tuesday said its board has approved raising up to Rs 16,600 crore (about USD 2 billion) through share sale.

The announcement came a day after the group's power utility Adani Energy Solutions Ltd got a similar approval for raising up to Rs 12,500 crore via qualified institutional placement (QIP) or through any other permissible modes.

The fundraising may happen in one or more tranches, Adani Enterprises said in a stock exchange filing.

Both the companies will need other approvals including from shareholders.

While Adani Enterprises Ltd has called a shareholder meeting on 24 June for approving the fund raise, Adani Energy Solutions Ltd's annual general meeting (AGM) is scheduled the next day.

The fundraising may happen in one or more tranches *PHOTO: FREEPIK*

Both the firm's secured similar approvals in 2023 but those approvals were set to expire in June, triggering the need for a fresh nod.

In May 2023, the board of Adani Enterprises had approved fundraise of Rs 12,500 crore via QIPs. That month, Adani Energy Solutions, too, got a board nod for raising Rs 8,500 crore through QIP.

A QIP is, at its core, a way for listed companies to raise capital without having to submit legal paperwork to market regulators.

Adani Group's stocks at their lowest point took a beating of about USD 150 billion in market value but have since recovered. Four of the 10 listed Adani firms have risen to pre-Hindenburg levels and tycoon Adani's net worth has surged USD 25 billion this year to go past USD 109 billion.

He is now ranked at No 13 in the world, just one rank below Mukesh Ambani who is worth USD 114 billion.

Adani Enterprises in February last year called off a follow-on share sale through which it had raised Rs 20,000 crore as the group stock plunged following Hindenburg accusing the group of accounting fraud, stock manipulation and improper use of tax havens. Adani group has denied all allegations. *—PTI*

RS 50,000 CR DEAL

India, France to begin negotiations for Rafale jets

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

In a significant development, contract negotiations between the governments of India and France in the over Rs 50,000 crore deal for 26 Rafale Marine fighter jets is scheduled to begin on 30 May with the arrival of a high-level French team.

French side would meet with Indian Defence Ministry counterparts to begin official negotiations in the fighter jet deal for the Indian Navy under which aircraft would be operated from both aircraft carriers operated by the force, defence industry. The French team will include officials from their defence ministry and industry including original equipment manufacturers Dassault Aviation and Thales, the officials said.

Indian side would include members from the defence acquisition wing and the Indian Navy.

Sources in the government said that they would try to complete negotiations with France and sign the agreement by the end of this financial year. France had submitted its response to India's tender for buying 26 Rafale Marine jets for the Indian Navy's aircraft carriers - INS Vikrant and INS Vikramaditya in December itself.

India will now go in for tough negotiations in the deal with French government officials, as it is a government-to-government contract. . *—ANI*

Closing bell: Sensex falls 220 points, Nifty settles at 22,900

MUMBAI, 28 MAY

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower on Tuesday in highly volatile trade, extending their losing run to the third day in a row as investors opted for profit-taking amid uncertainty ahead of the results of Lok Sabha polls.

After gyrating between gains and losses during the day, the 30-share BSE Sensex finally ended 220.05 points or 0.29 per cent lower at 75,170.45. During the day, it hit a high of 75,585.40 and a low of 75,083.22.

NSE Nifty dropped 44.30 points or 0.19 per cent to settle at 22,888.15 despite beginning the day on a positive note.

From the Sensex firms, Power Grid, NTPC, Tech Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, Tata Motors, IndusInd Bank, Reliance Industries, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Maruti were among the laggards.

Asian Paints, Wipro, JSW Steel, Hindustan Unilever, Bajaj Finserv and Mahindra & Mahindra were among the biggest gainers.

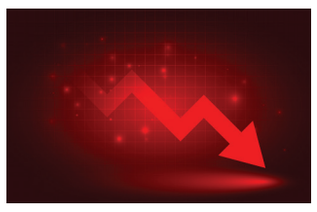


PHOTO: FREEPIK

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 541.22 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

India's core monsoon zone covering most of the rain-fed agriculture areas in the country is likely to receive above-normal rainfall this season, the IMD said on Monday.

The BSE benchmark ended lower by 19.89 points or 0.03 per cent at 75,390.50 on Monday. Intra-day, the barometer climbed 599.29 points or 0.79 per cent to an all-time peak of 76,009.68.

The Nifty declined by 24.65 points or 0.11 per cent to end at 22,932.45. The 50-issue barometer climbed 153.7 points or 0.66 per cent to hit a new lifetime high of 23,110.80 during the day. *—PTI*

KAL, Maran's Rs 1.3 crore damage claim false: SpiceJet

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

In an escalation of the ongoing dispute, SpiceJet on Tuesday said the claims made by KAL Airways and Kalanithi Maran for more than Rs 1,323 crore in damages are baseless and legally untenable.

On Monday, KAL Airways and Kalanithi Maran said they will seek more than Rs 1,323 core in damages from SpiceJet and its chief Ajay Singh as well as challenge the recent Delhi High Court order in the ongoing dispute between the two sides.

In a regulatory filing, SpiceJet said it strongly refutes the claims made by KAL Airways and Maran regarding seeking damages of Rs 1,323 crore.

"These assertions are not only legally untenable but also a regurgitation of previously rejected claims by the arbitral tribunal and then the Delhi High Court," the airline said in the filing on Tuesday.

According to the carrier, KAL Airways and Maran initially sought damages of more than Rs 1,300 crore during the arbitration proceedings.

PHOTO: PTI

Meanwhile, SpiceJet on Tuesday also said that following the court ruling, it will now pursue a refund of Rs 450 crore.

The case dates back to early 2015, when Singh, who owned the airline earlier, bought it back from Maran after it was grounded for months due to resource crunch.

As part of the agreement, Maran and KAL Airways had claimed to have paid SpiceJet Rs 679 crore for issuing warrants and preference shares.

On Tuesday, shares of SpiceJet declined 1.68 per cent to Rs 57.29 apiece in afternoon trade on the BSE. *—PTI*

Link PAN with Aadhaar by 31 May: I-T dept

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

The income tax department on Tuesday asked taxpayers to link PAN with Aadhaar by 31 May to avoid tax deduction at a higher rate.

As per income tax rules, if a Permanent Account Number (PAN) is not linked with biometric Aadhaar, TDS is required to be deducted at double the applicable rate.

Last month, the income tax department issued a circular stating that no action will be taken for short deduction of TDS in case the assessee links his/her PAN with Aadhaar by 31 May.

"Please link your PAN with Aadhaar before 31 May, 2024, if you haven't already, in order to avoid tax deduction at a higher rate," the department posted on X.

In a separate post, the I-T department asked reporting entities, including banks, forex dealers, to file SFT by 31 May to avoid penalties.

The reporting entities which are required to file SFT returns with tax authorities include forex dealers, banks, sub-registrar, NBFC, post offices, issuer of bonds/debentures, mutual fund trustees, company paying dividend or buying back shares.

These specified institutions are required to furnish the details of certain financial transactions or any reportable account registered/recorded/maintained by them during the year. Delay in filing of SFT returns may attract a penalty of up to Rs 1,000 for each day of default. Non-filing or filing inaccurate statement may also lead to levy of penalty.

Through SFT, the income tax department keeps a track of high value transactions undertaken by an individual. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X@JENKERS_EN

Govt imposes ₹1,79,000 penalty on Bharati Airtel

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

The Department of Telecom has imposed a penalty on Bharti Airtel for violating subscriber verification norms, the company informed the exchange in a filing on Tuesday. The company stated that it received a notice from the telecom department of Punjab LSA (Licensed Service Areas) on 27 May for violations of subscriber verification norms under the Licensee Agreement, following a sample CAF (Customer Application Form) audit conducted by the department for March 2024.

The department has imposed a penalty of Rs 1,79,000 on the telecom operator for these violations.

Before that, in March, the Department of Telecom (DoT) imposed a penalty of around Rs 4 lakh on Bharti Airtel for violating subscriber verification norms. The penalties were imposed in the Delhi and Bihar circles. *—ANI*

RBI imposes monetary penalty on Yes Bank & ICICI Bank

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has imposed monetary penalty on Yes Bank and ICICI Bank for non-compliances with certain directions issued by it.

The penalties imposed on them are Rs 91 lakh and Rs 1 crore, respectively, RBI said in its orders.

RBI said Yes Bank did not comply with 'Customer Service in Banks', and 'Un-authorized Operation of Internal/Office Accounts'.

Based on supervisory findings of non-compliance with RBI directions and related correspondence in that regard, a notice was issued to the bank advising it to show cause as to why penalty should not be imposed on it for its failure to comply with the said directions

After considering the bank's reply to the notice, oral submissions made during the personal hearing and examination of additional submissions made by it, RBI found that the charges against the bank were sustained, warranting imposition of monetary penalty.

Separately, RBI said ICICI Bank did not comply with certain directions issued by RBI on 'Loans and Advances - Statutory and Other Restrictions'.

RBI found that ICICI Bank had sanctioned term loan(s) to certain entities in lieu of or to substitute budgetary resources envisaged for certain projects; without undertaking due diligence on the viability and bankability of the projects to ensure that revenue streams from the projects were sufficient to take care of the debt servicing obligations; the repayment/servicing of which was made out of budgetary resources; and without ensuring that the funding proposals were for specific monitorable projects. *—ANI*

Penalties imposed on them are Rs 91L & Rs 1cr, respectively *PHOTO: ANI*

AMID ROBUST GROWTH

Indian fertiliser industry reach Rs 1.38 lakh cr by 2032: IMARC Report

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Indian fertiliser industry is on a robust growth trajectory, expected to reach a market size of Rs 1.38 lakh crore by 2032, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 4.2 per cent from 2024 to 2032, according to the latest report by IMARC Group.

This growth underscores the sector's vital role in supporting India's agricultural productivity and food security.

In 2023, the Indian fertiliser market size stood at Rs 94,210 crore, driven by increased agricultural demands and strategic governmental interventions.

Fertiliser production in FY24 was recorded at 45.2 million tonnes, reflecting the Ministry of Fertilisers' successful policies. India's position as the world's second-largest producer of fruits and vegetables, next only to China, underpins the fertiliser industry's growth.

In 2023, fertilizer market stood at Rs 94,211 crore *PHOTO: FREEPIK*

The government has mandated 100 per cent Neem coating on all subsidized agricultural grade urea to enhance nutrient efficiency, improve crop yield, and maintain soil health, while also preventing the diversion of urea for non-agricultural purposes.

India has also established itself as a global leader in nano agricultural inputs, including nano fertilisers and micro-nutrients, promoting environmental sustainability without compromising crop yields.

The Indian government aims to achieve self-sufficiency in urea production by 2025-26 through increased local production of nano urea.

Additionally, the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) promotes organic farming, offering Rs 50,000 per hectare for three years, with INR 31,000 directly allocated to farmers for organic inputs. The potential market for organic and bio fertilisers is poised for expansion.

- India has also established itself as a global leader in nano agricultural inputs, including nano fertilizers and micro-nutrients, promoting environmental sustainability

Climate change poses a significant challenge, with projections suggesting a potential 19.3 per cent reduction in wheat yields by 2050.

Continuous research and innovation are essential for developing new types of fertilisers and improving existing ones. *—ANI*

Banks' credit growth in FY25 to slow down: Crisil

MUMBAI, 28 MAY

Domestic rating agency Crisil on Tuesday said the banking system's credit growth will drop by 2 percentage points to 14 per cent in financial year 2024-25.

The slowdown will be due to lower GDP growth at 6.8 per cent in FY25, as against 7.6 per cent in FY24, RBI measures like higher risk weights on unsecured loans and also a high base, the agency said.

Slower deposit accretion can keep a check on credit growth, the agency said, admitting that the differential between the deposit and credit growth has reduced over the past year.

It said financial year 2024-25 witnessed a 16 per cent growth in bank credit, if one were to exclude the impact of the HDFC merger, and attributed the same to strong economic activity and higher retail demand.

On the corporate front, steel, cement and pharmaceuticals will lead the capex recovery, its senior director Ajit Velonie said, adding that emerging sectors such as electronics and semiconductors, electric vehicles (EVs) and solar modules will also contribute to capex, especially over the medium-term.

Growth in the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) segment (16 per cent of overall credit) is estimated to drop to 15 per cent from 19 per cent in FY24, it said.

Agricultural credit growth will remain linked to monsoon trends but should witness a moderation on the back of a strong fiscal 2024, it said. *—PTI*

Ruud storms into 2nd round with a straight-set victory

Medvedev battles past Koepfer, Monfils thrills home fans

PARIS, 28 MAY

Casper Ruud, Elena Rybakina AND Daniil Medvedev PHOTO: X/@WTA)

Casper Ruud, a two-time French Open finalist, advanced to the second round of the 2024 French Open after a commanding victory over Felipe Alves 6-3, 6-4, 6-3 in the men's singles opening round. Demonstrating why he is regarded as a formidable contender, the world No. 7 relied on his powerful groundstrokes and strategic play to keep Alves at bay throughout the match.

From the onset, Ruud's dominance was evident. Serving at close to 90% on his first serves, the Norwegian quickly established control, breaking Alves' serve to go up 5-3 in the first set after a prolonged battle on his seventh break opportunity. The first set was secured with a decisive 6-3 finish, setting the tone for the rest of the match.

In the second set, Ruud's tactical prowess shone through as he did not allow Alves a single break point, maintaining consistent pressure with his aggressive baseline play.

Fourth seed Rybakina races into French Open second round

Elena Rybakina powered into the French Open second round with a straight-sets victory over Belgian Greet Minnen on Tuesday.

The former Wimbledon champion wrapped up a 6-2, 6-3 success in only 73 minutes and will next face either three-time Grand Slam champion Angelique Kerber or Dutchwoman Arantxa Rus.

"Happy to be back and compete here," said Rybakina, who withdrew ahead of the third round last year due to illness.

Kazakh world number four Rybakina is the only player to defeat tournament favorite Iga Swiatek on clay this season, in the Stuttgart semi-finals in April.

Medvedev battles past Koepfer

Daniil Medvedev banished the demons of a Paris first-round exit last summer with a hard-fought 6-3, 6-4, 5-7, 6-3 victory over Dominik Koepfer on Monday night.

The world No.5 returns to the Roland-Garros second round for the third time, where he'll meet Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic.

It appeared the 2021 US Open champion was unfairly receiving a chorus of jeers from the crowd as he entered Court Simonne-Mathieu.

Eagle-eyed fans had spotted Gilles Simon in the fifth seed's box and welcomed the French favorite with "gilet" ringing around.

Three previous meetings, all on hard courts, three wins in Medvedev's favor. The 28-year-old made a sublime start against Koepfer.

The pressure was on from the start with a series of disguised drop shots and booming flat forehands.

Koepfer had to execute exquisite shots just to win points. The drop shot was utilized with frequent, deft brilliance as Medvedev toyed with his opponent, bringing the German forward, back, side to side with consummate ease to move a set ahead.

—AP

BORDER GAVASKAR TROPHY

India A to play Australia A

MELBOURNE, 28 MAY

Allan border and Sunil Gavaskar PHOTO: PTI

India 'A' will play two first-class matches against Australia 'A' in the run-up to the marquee Border Gavaskar Trophy later this year, CA announced on Tuesday.

The two games are scheduled to be played at the Great Barrier Reef Arena in Mackay and the MCG from 31 October-3 November and 7 to 10 November respectively, Cricket Australia said.

The warm-up games will provide an opportunity for fringe players from both sides to push for a Test berth.

"Hosting those A matches at the upgraded Great Barrier Reef Arena and the MCG give these 'A' matches significant status and will provide great opportunities to players from both sides to put up their hand for selection," said Peter Roach, CA Head of Cricket Operations and Scheduling.

The Indian team will also play a three-day intra-squad match at the WACA Ground from 17 November. India had played warm-up matches against Australia A in their previous tour Down Under in 2020-21 as well.

The opening Test is set to be held at the Optus Stadium in Perth from 22 November. It will be the first time since the 1991-92 season that the marquee series has been extended to five Tests.

"To have that (the series) running simultaneously with the women's ODIs and preceded by two significant Australia A v India A matches will be terrific for our fans," Roach added.

The Indian women's cricket team will also be touring Australia around the same time. The second ODI between the two sides on December 8 is set to clash with the second Test.

Australia have not won the Border Gavaskar Trophy since 2017, having lost all past four series 2-1, including two at home in 2018-19 and 2020-21.

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI

Vikramaditya to captain India in World Racketlon

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

Vikramaditya Chaufla was on Tuesday named captain of the six-member India squad for the World Racketlon Championship in Rotterdam from 31 July to 4 August. Racketlon is a combination sport in which the competitors are required to play four racket sports: table tennis, badminton, tennis, and squash. *—PTI*

T20 WC: India is the strongest side, says Morgan

LONDON, 28 MAY

India's remarkable reservoir of talent and formidable depth within their squad makes them strong contenders to win the upcoming T20 World Cup, feels former England skipper Eoin Morgan.

India has gone with almost the same squad as they had in the last edition of the T20 World Cup while adding the likes of young Yashasvi Jaiswal, Yuzvendra Chahal, and Sanju Samson.

"The strongest side even with injuries throughout the tournament is India. Their strength and depth is incredible," Morgan said on Sky Sports.

"And it's almost probably, we're talking about who the players that were missed out in their squad of 15 because of the quality that they possess.

"They are favorites for me, the quality they have on paper, if they produce it I think they can beat anybody quite well in the tournament," he added. India were spoilt for choice as they were forced to leave the likes of Shubman Gill and KL Rahul.

"The only decision I would have had differently and if I

England skipper Eoin Morgan PHOTO: X / @EOINMORGAN16

was selecting the squad, would have Shubman Gill over Yashasvi Jaiswal. I have played alongside him, I know how he thinks. I know how he works. "I feel he's a future leader within that side and in big moments, in World Cups the more leaders the better. Even if he's sitting on the sideline, you still need inspiration from here and there, a sense of positivity."

India heads into almost every tournament as favourites but they haven't won an ICC title in over a decade. The last trophy the 'Men in Blue' lifted was the Champions Trophy in 2013.

In the last edition of the T20 World Cup, they were hammered by 10 wickets by eventual winners England in the semifinals in Adelaide. *—PTI*

Norway Chess: Pragg beats Alireza in Armageddon

STAVANGER, 28 MAY

Praggnanandhaa PHOTO: X / @RPRAGGNACHESS

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa got off to a flier and defeated Firouzja Alireza of France in the Armageddon game in the first round of the Norway Chess tournament here on Tuesday.

After an easy draw under normal time control, Praggnanadhaa got 10 minutes as white compared to Alireza's seven but with the condition that he had to win as a draw would have given black extra points.

The Indian was clinical in his approach and carved out a fine victory in the endgame.

The day saw all the games under classical time control ending in draws in both men's and women's sections and as many as six Armageddon happened to decide the winner in this unique format.

World number one Magnus Carlsen played out a 14-move draw in classical and then a 68-move marathon draw with reigning world champion Ding Liren to seal the day in his favor while Hikaru Nakamura proved stronger than American compatriot Fabiano Caruana in the Armageddon.

After the end of the first round, Praggnanandhaa, Carlsen, and Nakamura share the lead on 1.5 points apiece while Alireza, Liren, and Caruana follow them a half point behind.

Each win under classical time control here is worth three points while the winner takes 1.5 home in the Armageddon with one point for the one on the receiving end.

—PTI

AIFF invited bids for IWL

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

The All India Football Federation's (AIFF) League Committee on Tuesday recommended that bids be invited from interested parties to form a new Indian Women's League (IWL) side and make it a 10-team tournament.

The move is in line with FIFA and AFC's recommendation for the league to complete its quota of 90 matches.

The committee, in its first order of the day, discussed revisions to the entry fees of various leagues – I-League, I-League 2, I-League 3, IWL, IWL 2, Futsal Club Championship, Youth Leagues, and the Super Cup.

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI

Satwik-Chirag suffers shock defeat in opening round of Singapore Open

LONDON, 28 MAY

World No. 1 Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty crashed out of the Singapore Open after suffering a shock defeat against Denmark's world number 34 Daniel Lundgaard and Mads Vestergaard in the opening round, here Tuesday. One of the favorites to win a gold medal at the Paris Olympics, Satwik and Chirag, who had claimed the Thailand Open Super 500 early this month, lost 20-22 18-21 to Daniel and Mads in a 47-minute clash of the Super 750 badminton tournament. *—PTI*

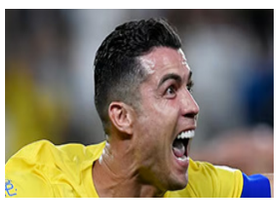


PHOTO: X / @CRISTIANO

Ronaldo sets Saudi Pro League season scoring record

RIYADH, 28 MAY

Cristiano Ronaldo finished the Saudi Pro League by setting the season goal-scoring record on Monday. Ronaldo scored twice in Riyadh as Al-Nassr defeated Al-Ittihad 4-2 and lifted his league tally to 35, one more than the record in 2019 by Abderrazak Hamdallah. In the final seconds of the first half, Ronaldo, who had already had two goals ruled out for offside, chested down a long pass from Mohammed Al-Fatil and opened the scoring with a low shot from the left side of the area. *—AP*

NRAI ANNOUNCES 23-MEMBER TEAM FOR MUNICH

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

The National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) on Tuesday announced a 23-member squad for the upcoming ISSF World Cup in Munich, to be held from May 31 to June 8.

The top three shooters recently seen in action during the Olympic Selection Trials are part of the squad. India will participate in all the 10 Olympic events.

Speaking before the departure of the squad, NRAI senior vice president Kalikesh Narayan Sing Deo, said, "Some shooters had some obvious queries about the program, given it is in the lead up to the Olympics, but we had a word with all them and convinced them of the importance of shooting at the Munich World Cup and camp in France thereafter."

The team, after competing at the Munich World Cup, will proceed to a camp in France before heading back for a two-week break at home.

They will then assemble for a camp in Bhopal, before departing for the Olympic Games in Paris.

—PTI

NISHANT OUTCLASSES OTGONBAATAR IN 2 MINS

BANGKOK, 28 MAY

Nishant Dev PHOTO: PTI

Nishant Dev out-punched his Mongolian opponent in just over two minutes to progress to the 71kg pre-quarterfinals while Abhinash Jamwal ran out of luck as he was knocked out of the second Boxing World Olympic Qualifiers here on Tuesday.

Dev, who had narrowly missed out on an Olympic berth at the previous qualifiers, began with a flurry of punches against Mongolia's Otgonbaatar Byambaerdeneto to force a standing count in the very first minute.

A combination of a jab and cross hook led to another standing count and the Referee Stopped the Contest (RSC) with 58 seconds still left to play in Round 1.

Earlier, Jamwal fought back with gumption after losing a close first round against Colombia's Jose Manuel Viafara Fory in the 63.5kg bout.

He dominated the third and final round forcing a tie on points from all five judges.

However, as per the rules, the judges were asked to weigh the performance again and decide on the winner after the scores were level. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X / @NOTBILLWALTON

Bill Walton, Hall of Fame player dies of cancer at 71

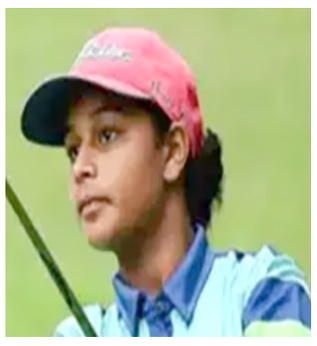
NEW YORK, 28 MAY

Bill Walton was never afraid to be himself. Larger than life, only in part because of his nearly 7-foot frame, Walton was a two-time NCAA champion at UCLA, a two-time champion in the NBA, a Basketball Hall of Fame inductee, an on-court icon in every sense of the word. And off the court, Walton was a chronic fun-seeker, a broadcaster who adhered to no conventional norms and took great joy in that, a man with a deeply serious side about the causes that mattered most to him. Walton died Monday at the age of 71 after a prolonged fight with cancer, the league announced on behalf of his family. *—PTI*

SINGAPORE LADIES MASTERS

Hitaashee, Seher, and Mahreen to play

SINGAPORE, 28 MAY



Hitaashee Bakshi and Seher Atwal

PHOTO: PTI

Indian professionals Hitaashee Bakshi and Seher Atwal will tee up at the Singapore Ladies Masters when it makes a much-awaited return to the Laguna National Golf Resort Club in June.

The duo will be part of the field of 132 players, including 12 elite amateurs vying for top honors in the China Ladies Professional Golf Association (CLPGA) event scheduled to tee off at the Masters course on 14 June.

Hitaashee and Seher will be joined by teen amateur Mehreen Bhatia, a much-decorated junior.

Hitaashee, a multiple winner on the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour, is also playing on the Thai LPGA, where she topped the Qualifying School this year. Seher is a multiple winner on the domestic Hero WPGT and has also been playing on the Ladies European Tour. This is her second appearance at the Singapore Ladies Masters.

Mahreen, a silver medallist at the US Kids World Teen Championships in 2023, was also a medallist at the US Kids European event. She also won the Dubai Faldo Junior Middle East Championships in 2023 and in November last year, she added the Faldo Abu Dhabi event title.

The Singapore Ladies Masters will be the sixth leg of this season's CLPGA Tour and carries a prize purse of USD 100,000, where the winner will receive a USD 15,000 prize check.

At the inaugural Singapore Ladies Masters last July, Singapore's amateur standout Shannon Tan delighted the home crowd by outshining her seasoned professional counterparts to claim the championship.

With the tournament offering valuable Rolex Women's World Golf Rankings points, Shannon, who transitioned to professional status in January 2024, gained a crucial advantage in her quest to qualify for the Paris Olympics.

Following her breakthrough victory, Shannon's career has seen a remarkable trajectory, highlighted by her recent triumph at the Magical Kenya Ladies Open in February, where she secured her maiden Ladies European Tour (LET) title. Apart from the top stars, entries have been given to some promising stars, and invitations were sent out to various Asian countries to send some players.

The top 60 finishers (including ties) in the first two rounds will advance to the final round on Sunday. *—PTI*

- Indian professionals Hitaashee Bakshi and Seher Atwal will tee up at the Singapore Ladies Masters when it makes a much-awaited return to the Laguna National Golf Resort Club in June.

No MotoGP in India in 2024 as race shifted to 2025

NEW DELHI, 28 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

The India round of the MotoGP championship will not take place on the scheduled date in September and instead has been moved to March 2025, local promoters of the race told PTI on Tuesday.

Reports claiming that the race promoters had not cleared all their dues with rights holders Dorna after the inaugural round last year had led to uncertainty over the second edition scheduled from September 20-22.

However, after Tuesday's meeting involving all stakeholders Dorna, and, co-promoters Fairstreet Sports and the Uttar Pradesh government it was decided to shift the round to a yet-to-be-decided date in March."It was mutually decided to shift the race to March next year.

We are looking at the first or second week of March. All the stakeholders including Dorna agreed that the September weather is not conducive for the race and it is tough on the riders and marshals as experienced last year," Fairstreet Sports CEO Pushkar Nath Srivastava told PTI.

When asked if the postponement of the race had anything to do with unpaid dues, Srivastava responded with a clear "no"."All payments were being made in between and whatever is left will be paid by next month.

So that was not a factor in shifting the race to next year. We also thought of doing it in November but that would have meant four back-to-back races which would have been tough on the teams and the riders," said Srivastava.

More than 50,000 fans turned up at the Buddh International Circuit during the inaugural race, just enough to fill half of the facility." *—PTI*